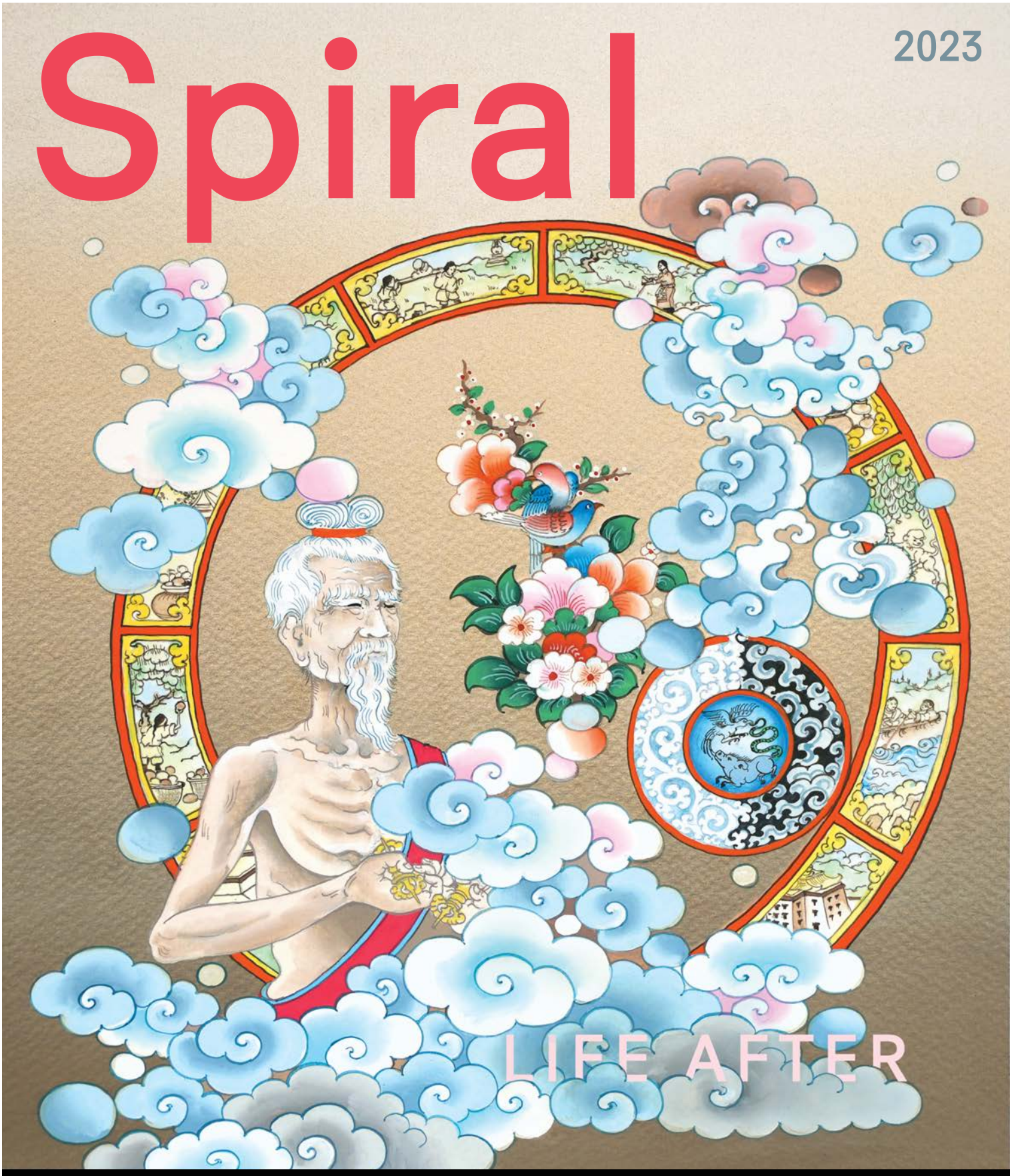
Spiral

2023



LIFE AFTER

THE RUBIN

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About the Cover

The painting features the outer rim of the wheel of the existence, which illustrates the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. The meditating yogi represents the path to nirvana, or enlightenment, showing that one can cut to the root of all suffering and achieve enlightenment by practicing an altruistic, compassionate mind and understanding the true nature of *shuniyata* (emptiness). Two birds sitting on the lotus flower symbolize peace, kindness, joy, love, and nonviolence. The clouds represent the ever-changing, impermanent nature of the world.

About the Cover Artist

Rabkar Wangchuk is a Tibetan artist, thangka painter, sculptor, and stupa architect. He was born in Dharamshala, India, and at age seven enrolled as a novice monk at the Gyudmed Tantric Monastery. For twenty years he immersed himself in the Tibetan science of arts and crafts, and his style further evolved after he moved to the United States. Using traditional Tibetan Buddhist artistic methods and contemporary styles, Wangchuk merges Tibetan imagery with the modern iconography of consumerism and hybrid identities. He lives in Queens, New York.

BEFORE *AND* AFTER

Our lives are filled with transitions that often propel us into unknown territory and elicit change. Perhaps the most trying and seemingly absolute of these transitions is the one at the end of a life cycle. Tibetan Buddhist traditions call this interstitial period the bardo, and it contains the opportunity to escape the endless circle of life, death, and rebirth by attaining enlightenment.

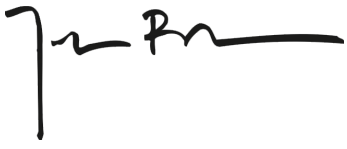
As a collective we have gone through a turbulent period and have hopefully accumulated experiences that ready us, maybe not for enlightenment, but perhaps for the next phase to come.

It is clear that we can never return to the before, and in a world facing unprecedented change, these moments can be catalysts to accept impermanence, wake up to our ignorance, and step into greater awareness. Drawing on the theme of the Rubin Museum of Art and *Spiral* magazine for 2023, how do we approach and navigate Life After?

The shift for cultural institutions worldwide has been seismic. For the Rubin, Life After has meant reaching people where they are. Our traveling Mandala Lab, an immersive journey addressing afflictive emotions, debuted in Spain and will tour through Europe in the coming years. Project Himalayan Art, our hitherto largest institutional project comprising a digital platform, monumental publication, and touring exhibition, is now on the road across the United States, with the goal of exposing more people to the rich cultural legacy of the Himalayan region. Our *AWAKEN* podcast continues to engage people in topics relevant to our lives and times. And in New York City, we're exploring ideas about the afterlife through our 2023 exhibition, *Death Is Not the End*.

The current edition of *Spiral* examines the concept of Life After through individual and collective stories. In these pages you'll meet a birth and a death doula who help people during transcendent moments; a photographer who chronicles her mother's death and Hindu mourning rituals in both poignant words and images; and a Tibetan writer on their gender transition, among other chroniclers of change. You'll learn how to create an ethical will and discover a simple art exercise for self-insight when moving from one phase to the next.

Wherever you may be, we hope you find inspiration in these stories to face your own moments of change with greater curiosity and openness.



Jorrit Britschgi
Executive Director
Rubin Museum of Art

Henk Loorbach is an Amsterdam-based multidisciplinary artist cruising the fields of filmmaking, sculpting, and design who has a love for the weird and the wonderful of the every day. He created the illustrations for the Life After series.

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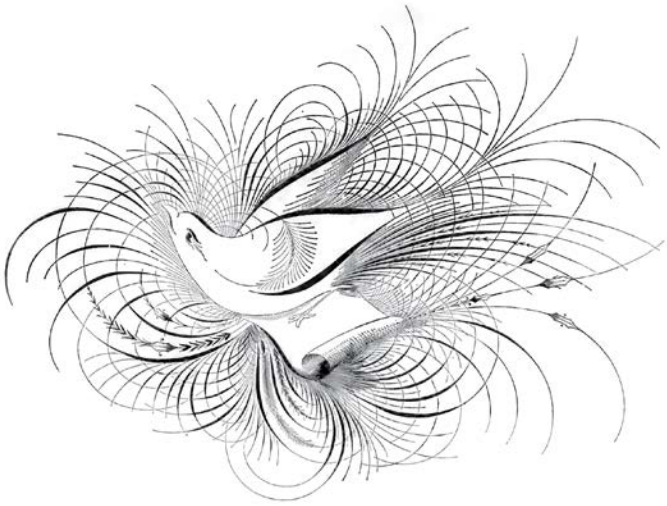

Howard Kaplan is an editor and writer who helped found *Spiral* magazine in 2017. He currently works at the Smithsonian and divides his time between Washington, DC, and New York City.

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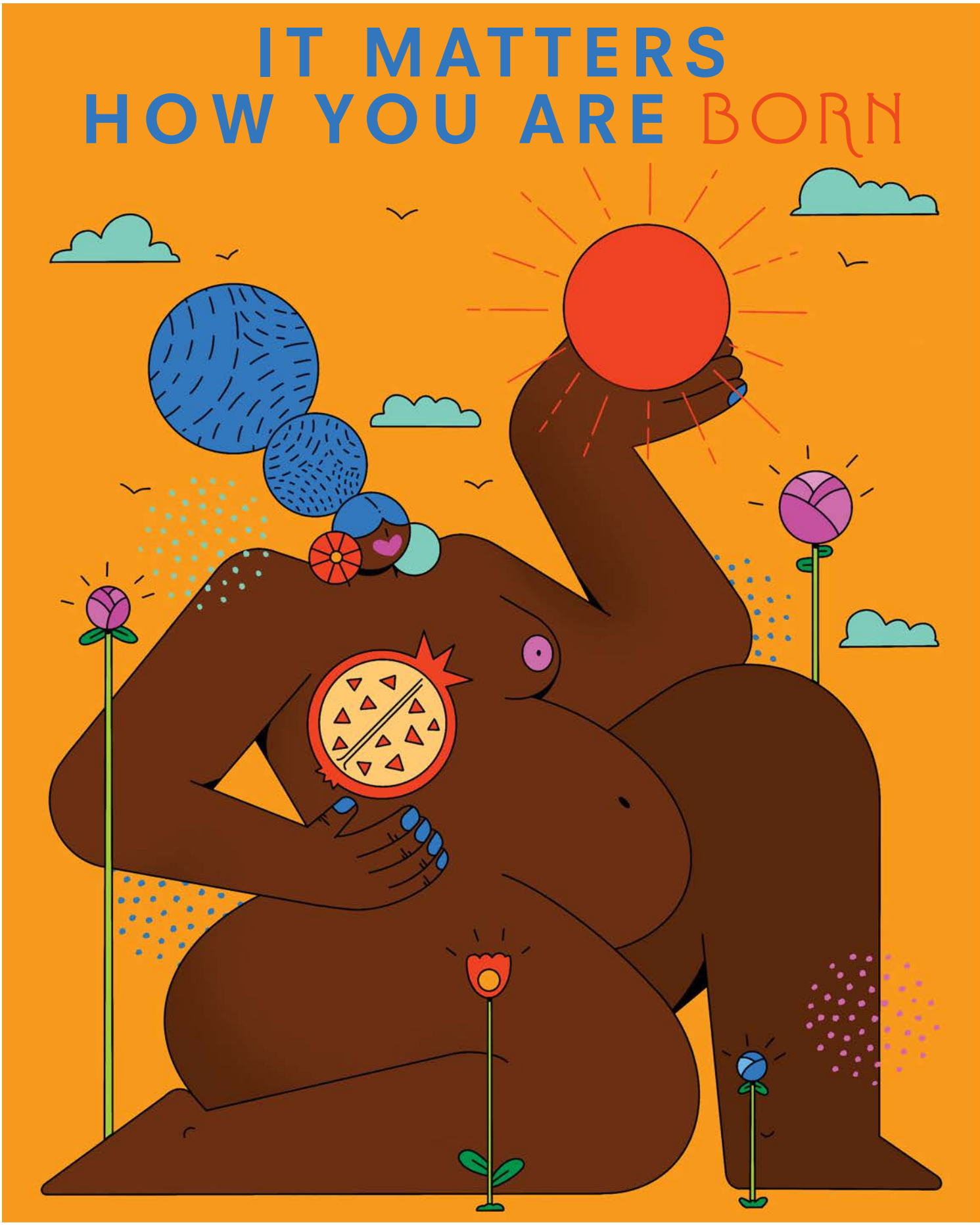

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SOFIA ROMAGNOLA

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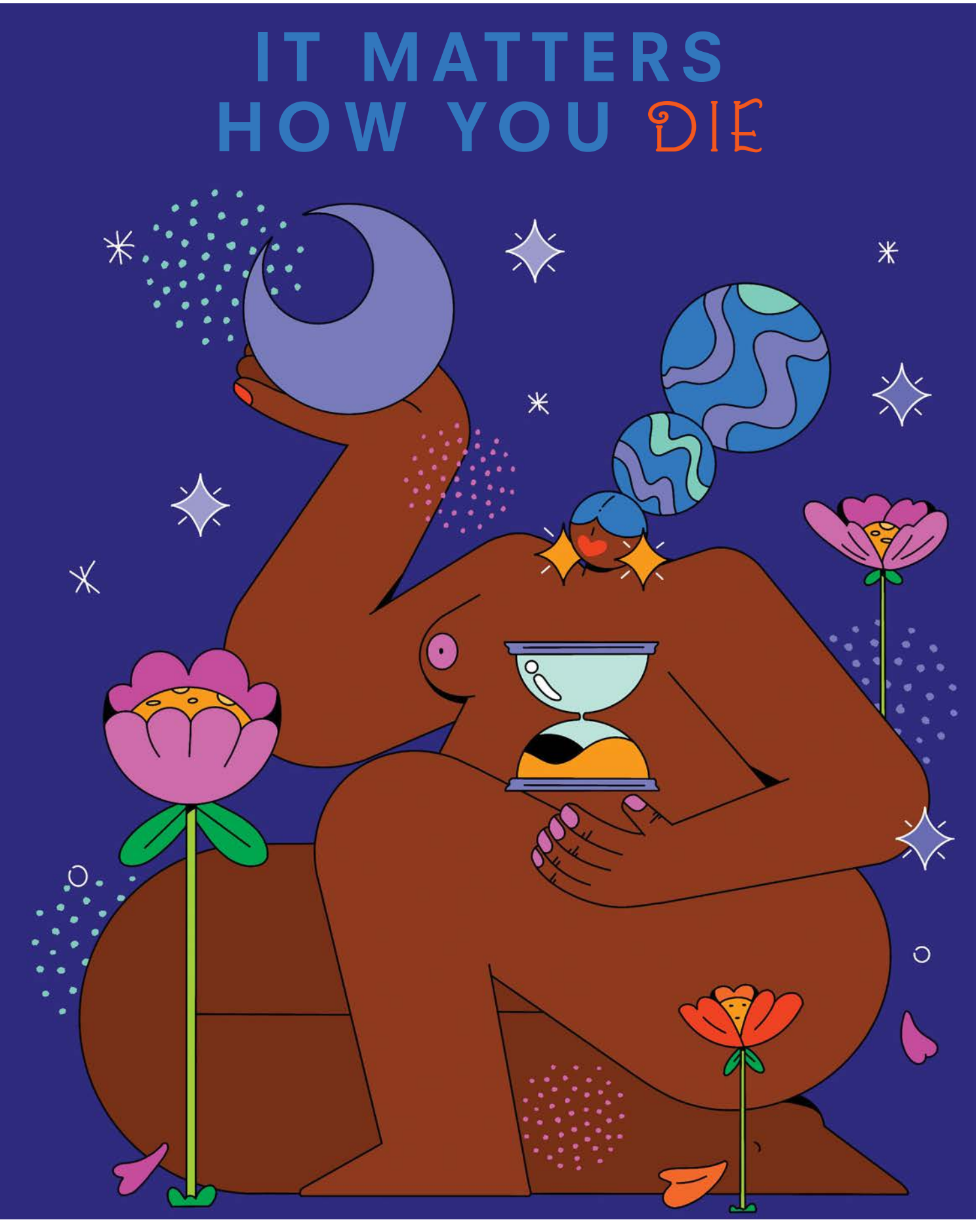

LATHAM THOMAS AND ALUA ARTHUR INTERVIEWED

A birth doula and a death doula share how support helps people through major life transitions

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LATHAM THOMAS is a birth doula and founder of Mama Glow.

How do you describe your role and what you do?
Latham Thomas: My role as a birth worker is a calling. I get to provide support as a mentor and educator and leader of a global doula training program, Mama Glow, and I get to help usher in the next generation of birth workers into the field. I see myself as a servant leader, and I'm in service of women and birthing people.

What do you find the most meaningful or rewarding about what you do?
The most meaningful thing about this work is that you get to support people at the threshold of change in their lives. You get to watch people transform and become new versions of themselves. Two decades ago I was pregnant with my son. It's such a distant experience for me, but every time that I support someone, I'm reminded of my own experience, my own vulnerability. I'm also reminded that we are all connected by this incredible experience of having lived inside of another person who supported us, cultivated us, fed us, nurtured us, birthed us earthside.

What is the most difficult or challenging part of what you do?
The United States is the most dangerous place in the developed world to give birth, so a challenging part is having to fight against injustice, to constantly be advocating on behalf of individuals who should be seen in their dignity and their humanity. This is important work, but it's also very exhausting. We're navigating racist and misogynistic systems that make it hard to continue, but we must continue.

What lessons have you gleaned about life, from watching people give birth?
I've given birth myself, and what I learned is that the primal template that is in place for us—and what is possible for us to experience—is so deep. It's not just about having a safe, dignified, healthy birth. It's also about having transcendence, because birth is really a trance. Birth is a meditation. When we can allow women and birthing people to feel safe and dignified and supported and unobserved, when we trust in their ability to birth, then we have different birth outcomes. It's everyone's birthright to have joy and feel empowered during their birth experience.

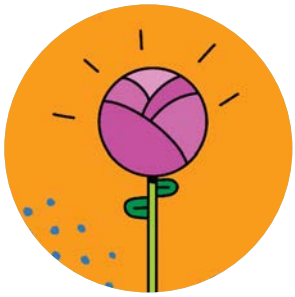
What do you wish more people knew about birth? Do you have any advice for people undergoing this transition or transitions in general?
Support is critical at every life transition. I think about the reproductive life cycle, and the life course in general, and how there's no support. Menses, pregnancy, abortion and loss, postpartum, menopause—there's no support. At every juncture we lack the structural tools to properly support people, and not just through clinical pathways, but also emotional, mental, spiritual, ancestral pathways for support and healing. I believe that being held and nurtured and swaddled through life transitions helps us to embrace the next phase of our life with more ease.

How do you help people cope with uncertainty?
When people feel ungrounded or untethered because of uncertainty, I get them to focus on the things that are inside of their palm, what they can control. When they get to a place where they feel safety around what they can control, we start to uncover and explore the factors that are necessary for them to feel safety to be able to let go of control.

Everything is uncertain for the entire pregnancy. You don't know what's happening on a day-to-day basis. Part of what I try to connect people to is the magic and mystery of the process. That helps people to get out of their heads and more into their bodies.

Can you describe a particularly memorable birth that you witnessed or assisted with?
I'll talk about my own birth because that birth I witnessed and was transformed by, and it was the catalyst for a lot of the work that I do. My son's birth was on a Sunday afternoon at Elizabeth Seton Childbearing Center, a freestanding birth center in New York City. I was visited by my ancestors. It was a moment of deep transcendence. I felt myself separate from my physical body and ascend and hover over my body and watch my son be born. Because I didn't have language or a framework for this experience, I didn't tell the story for a while. Then I came to know other people who had similar experiences, and that influenced me to share my own truth.

When you are allowed the space to navigate the experience and allow your hormones, your brain, and your body and your baby to work together, it is a completely different experience than



how we currently navigate birth within our hospital system. I've witnessed so many beautiful births since, and every single time, it's like the first time.

How has working with people in birth shaped how you view death?
Doulas sit at the threshold of change. That space of transformation is part of the life cycle, and the life cycle includes death. Sometimes we witness death, and we're there to support people navigating miscarriage, infant loss, stillbirth. The skills that I bring to doula work also are skills that I brought to support my grandmother as she transitioned into the afterlife. It's really impacted how I view death. I think about death a lot, honestly, probably more than a lot of people. It makes me more grounded in the present moment, because I know this life isn't forever.

I feel like the relationship between birth and death are so close and aligned. It matters how you are born, and it matters how you die. Our focus should be on ensuring safety and dignity, as well as a sense of belonging and nurturing, for both of those experiences.

How do you see the relationship between life/death or birth/death?
Because we're in the midst of a maternal health crisis in this country, there are so many women who look like me who are dying unnecessarily at the hands of medical racism because they are Black. We know that sixty percent of these deaths could be prevented. You could be carrying life and your life not matter. So that is real for me—that life is delicate in that way.

Based on what you see in your professional life, do you have any insights that shape how you view what comes before life or after death?
I believe that there is a threshold, and that we go through rites. Just like we have birthing rites, I think there are death rites. As we arrive, we move through a liminal space and find our way into integration in our bodies. I think that as we leave, there's this moving out of our bodies where we dissolve. We pass through this liminal space and then separate.

Everyone who I've talked to who has experienced a near-death moment has spoken about how heavenly and beautiful it felt to separate and go where they were going before they were brought back. I would hope that passage feels safe so that we could prepare ourselves as we leave our physical bodies and consciousness to move into the next realm. Part of what we do as doulas is to help people in spirit and in flesh prepare themselves to transition from one plane to the next, from one aspect of self to the next.

Part of what I try to connect people to is the magic and the mystery of the process.

Latham Thomas is the founder of Mama Glow, a global maternal health and education brand and a doula education platform. Named one of Oprah Winfrey's SuperSoul 100, Latham is a fierce advocate for birth equity and works to bridge policy gaps in maternal health. She is a co-founder of The Doula Expo by Mama Glow, a culture-shifting festival centering and celebrating birthwork, and Mama Glow Foundation, which advances reproductive justice and birth equity through education, advocacy, and the arts.

ALUA ARTHUR is a death doula and founder of Going with Grace.

How do you describe your role and what you do?
Alua Arthur: I am a death doula and a death educator. A death doula is somebody who does all of the nonmedical care and support of the dying person and the family or circle of support through the entire process. So no matter what the needs are—be them emotional, spiritual, practical, logistical—anything nonmedical death doulas can support with. As a death educator, I'm constantly finding ways for people to be in and to live in relationship with their mortality that add value to their life itself. I also teach death doulas at Going with Grace.

What do you find the most meaningful or rewarding about what you do?
Getting to sit in big conversations with people about their life, about the things that create meaning, purpose, joy, connection, and presence for them is so exciting. It's also highly rewarding in that I'm nosy and so I get to dig into people's lives a little bit with them. But it feels good to be able to reflect something to somebody who has an opportunity to make a difference in their life based on a conversation that we've had. When people are getting close to the end of life, what is most rewarding is the opportunity to see if we can make the dying process a little more gentle. Obviously, none of us can do anything to take away any of the difficulty, the existential agony that people might experience at death. But if I can make it so that somebody isn't also thinking about what's going happen to their mail after they die—as a benign example—then everybody wins.

What is the most difficult or challenging part of what you do?
I think some people would think that I'd say all the death and all the dying, but that's not it at all. It's the building the business part. I'm looking forward to the day when the world can see the death doula as a "legitimate" role. I'm using air quotes around legitimate because legitimized by who? But my hope is that this job can be mainstream enough so that doulas don't

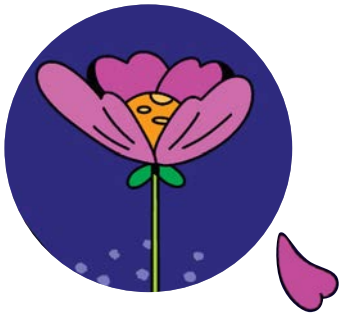
Death constantly reminds me what a miracle and mystery it is to experience life.

also have to be managing business while they're trying to support people.

What has been the most surprising part or an unexpected revelation?
I'm not surprised by how much I love it. I'm not surprised that the tide has started to turn toward it. I think maybe one of the more surprising parts is I thought that people would be more resistant to the work than they are. I thought that I would always be the weird girl at the party who was talking about death in the corner with one person. Well, I am that weird girl sitting in the corner talking to one person at the party. However, I was not prepared for how open people would be to the conversation. Although I feel like another part of me, the deep, deep, deep down inside part of me, always knew that people are down, which is why I've been down.

I think I've also been moderately surprised by how much lightness there is at death. People often think that it's very heavy and dark and sad, and don't get me wrong, there's pain and grief, and that can be sad. But it's not heavy.

What lessons have you gleaned about life, from watching people die?
That life is brief, precious, tiny. That it's utter magic. The fact that we get to be here, meet people, love people, feel love, feel hunger, find favorite foods and songs that feel good to our spirit, and do work that is in service—all of it is magic. Death constantly reminds me what a miracle and mystery it is to experience life.



What do you wish more people knew about death? Do you have any advice for people undergoing this particular transition?
I wish more people knew that you could have some support along the way. I wish more people knew that there was a lot more support than there is presently. So my advice when facing death would be to seek support. Seek support even if you don't think you need it. Find somebody who does this work and see how they can support you along the way.

As for people who are facing the death of someone close to them, I would tell them your sorrow or your grief are totally valid. I wish people knew that grief is valid. There's nothing bad about it. There's nothing wrong. You don't have to fix it. It's not bad. It's just painful. And you will survive.

How do you help people cope with uncertainty?
The benefit of my job is I don't have to help anybody get anywhere or fix something in their lives. I just get to be with them where they're at. I think acknowledging and validating that what they're currently struggling with is difficult and uncertain is a massive help. I'm not here to fix anybody. I'm not here to fix anybody's fear of the unknown. I'm just here to bear witness and to love them up along the way.

Can you describe a particularly memorable death that you witnessed or assisted with?
All of them. Many of them are memorable. There was one woman who had breast cancer. She was young and it was sad, but she was ready. She was tired of being sick. She planned a home funeral and invited her family from out of town and the friends that she'd made in Los Angeles. She knew exactly what she wanted. She knew exactly how she wanted her body dressed. She knew everything right down to the tee. That was one of the most memorable. Because often we think that people when they're dying young are much worse off in some way. She showed me and reminded me that no matter how old you are, you can still do it with grace.

How has working with people in death shaped how you view birth?
It's a constant reminder about how awe inspiring this whole life thing is. When you see somebody being born, you see how we're animals with all the blood, and everybody's stepping out of the way and watching magic unfolding. It's the same type of thing with death. You're watching magic unfold because the body knows what to do. The lungs shut down, the nervous system shuts down, the GI tract shuts down, systemically. It all shuts down until this vessel that used to hold life is now still. Utterly still. Awe inspiring at the least. Birth is the same. But I think societally we clap for birth and we shun death, but they are just two points on a continuum.

Based on what you see in your professional life, do you have any insights that shape how you view what comes before life or after death?
Nope. None whatsoever. All I know is anything is possible. Everything is possible. A hundred percent is possible, a hundred percent of the time. That's what I know so far.

Alua Arthur is a death doula, attorney, adjunct professor, and founder of Going with Grace, an end-of-life planning and death doula training organization that supports people as they answer the question "What must I do to be at peace with myself so that I may live presently and die gracefully?" Its goal is to bring grace and compassion to the cycle of life by planning for it and effortlessly tying up loose ends. Visit GoingWithGrace.com.

Spiritual First Responder

by Howard Kaplan

WORDS AND TEACHINGS FOR DIFFICULT TRANSITIONS

People are always reaching out to Swami Sarvapriyanda, a cordial, gracious, and learned man, to ask for his advice and counsel during difficult times, often to talk about illness, death, and loss. It could be via email or phone or even knocking on the door of the Vedanta Society on the Upper West Side. The order is known for its humanitarian work that includes responding to natural disasters like floods, fires, and earthquakes, as well as individuals seeking help. "We are almost like first responders on the scene," Swami tells me. "It's a huge part of our activity, what is known as karma yoga, the service to humanity, knowing that God is present in humanity."

When he was new to his role at the Vedanta Society of New York about five years ago, Swami received an email from a woman who said that she wanted to talk to him over Skype. It was one of many requests that the Swami received, so he gently postponed the meeting. He then got a reply saying, "Oh, no. I don't have time. I am dying. I'll be gone within a week or two, so I need to speak to you now." He immediately said yes. It turns out that she was already in hospice care in Canada, dying of cancer. They talked several times. "I don't know how much I benefitted her, but I benefitted from the interaction," Swami says.

The woman had been a Buddhist and Hindu practitioner all her life. Though she was elderly, she still had all her faculties about herself. "She was sharp, clear, and dignified," Swami tells me. "We had conversations about spiritual life, about death. She had accepted that she was going to die very soon, so she was very frank and pulled no punches." Towards the end, he noticed the grace with which she was facing her mortality and told her that when his time comes he hopes to be able to face it with the same dignity. "I still remember that she had a sort of wry smile on her face when she said, 'I'm sure you will, Swami.'"

One day she didn't turn up for the Skype call and Swami knew something had changed. A few days later her niece called him and said that her aunt had passed away. She told him, "The whole room felt lit up, not just by the sunlight streaming into the windows, but there was some kind of radiance in the room, a deep serenity. She was at peace after listening and talking to you."

Swami felt grateful that he was able to help her, but often when he sees people experiencing great loss, he feels a sense of inadequacy. "I sometimes don't know how these teaching and philosophies that I talk about are going to help in the face of immense crisis." He spoke about a chapter in the Bhagavad Gita that references changes and transitions in life, from childhood to youth to maturity to old age, followed by death and a new life, as akin to shedding old clothes and putting on new clothes, showing that death is the end of the physical body but not of the spiritual being. "The teachings somehow help, and I'm very glad for that," Swami adds, "They always seem to help."

Swami Sarvapriyananda is a Hindu monk and the minister and spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society of New York.

PRESENCE IN

In *tukdam*, clinically dead meditators are said to dwell in the luminosity of emptiness

BY *Donagh Coleman*

IN WHAT TIBETAN BUDDHISTS CALL *tukdam* (Wylie transliteration: *thugs dam*), experienced meditators die in meditative equipoise. Their bodies do not show the usual signs of death—such as smell, rigor mortis, or decomposition—for days or even weeks after their clinical deaths. They appear lifelike, and many even remain sitting upright in meditation posture. From the Tibetan Buddhist point of view, the meditators are resting in a subtle state of consciousness with an associated subtle material energy present in the body. They are still in the process of dying. Yet according to modern biomedical and legal definitions, they are dead. Many cases of *tukdam* have now been scientifically documented.

For my 2022 documentary film *Tukdam: Between Worlds* and research for my PhD in medical anthropology, I have been following the Tukdam Project, a ground-breaking scientific research initiative lead from the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and headed by renowned neuroscientist Richard Davidson.* It has focused on documenting *tukdam* bodies and trying to understand why the decomposition process seems to be delayed. His Holiness the Dalai Lama initiated this multidisciplinary project, which has been carried out with Tibetan collaborators from Delek Hospital in Dharamshala and Men-Tsee-Khang (Tibetan Medical and Astro-Science Institute) traditional Tibetan medicine doctors in India. In recent years, Russian and Indian scientific collaborators have also joined the effort to understand *tukdam* scientifically.

In following the project, I have been struck by the differing expectations and even cross-purposes that the Tibetan and scientific parties seem to harbor. Tibetans hope the research may reveal something about a subtle nature of consciousness that continues beyond clinical and brain death, and which is held to be responsible for keeping the bodies fresh. The Dalai Lama also seems to be invested in this research because of its potential to reveal something about

*Richard Davidson is a member of the Rubin Museum's advisory board.

the nature of consciousness that transcends the brain-body complex and even this life.

While the non-decaying *tukdam* body signifies the presence of consciousness for Tibetans, this is not obvious from a biophysical scientific perspective. Indeed, the Center for Healthy Minds has been looking for possible residual activity in the brainstem—a primitive part of the brain not thought to be involved in consciousness—as a factor contributing to the unusual integration of the bodies. In 2021, the research team published a null-finding stating they had not found any activity in the brain so far. Compelled to operate within a biophysical paradigm, scientists are also interested in possible changes to cell metabolism and breakdown, brought about by years of meditation practice, as perhaps contributing to the pristine post-mortem state of *tukdam* bodies. But taking samples from the bodies has so far been out of the question due to cultural sensitivity and the sacredness of these deaths. Tibetans are concerned that invasive procedures could disturb the post-mortem meditative state and the potential it carries for spiritual liberation and achieving a good rebirth.

An exchange from *Tukdam: Between Worlds* illustrates some of the tensions and cross-purposes with which the scientists and Tibetan parties have been operating, although there have been developments in the research and collaboration since the time of shooting in 2019 to early 2020. The scene shows a meeting where Dr. Dylan Lott, who was then the Tukdam Project manager in India, presents the current state of the research and its findings to Tibetan project collaborators. The Dalai Lama's personal physician, Dr. Tsetan Dorji Sadutshang, expresses frustration over the lack of results from years of research and what he sees as a misguided approach to explain *tukdam* in neuroscientific terms. According to the Tibetan view, something far more subtle than the "gross" mind related to the brain and senses is responsible for the physical signs of *tukdam*.

> Dr. Tsetan: To me, from my understanding of His Holiness' hope from this project, really is to have some proof that there is some sort of consciousness . . . or a mind continuing, that goes on beyond this life, basically. The only first kindergarten step is really to say: Is there a difference between a gross mind and a subtle mind?
>
> Dr. Lott: We cannot prove rebirth. We cannot prove mind. We cannot prove subtle mind. What we can do is look at the effects of those practices on the body that are unusual and that Western science, or medical science, doesn't have a good explanation for.

As is the case with science, it is not obvious to all Buddhist traditions that a non-decomposing body proves the presence of consciousness. The medieval Chinese Chan tradition, for example, also records miraculously preserved meditators' bodies. These did not, however, signify present consciousness, which according to widespread Buddhist doctrine, departs immediately at death to be reborn or to enter nirvana. Here the body is preserved due to purification by religious practice and virtue accumulated while alive.

There is something paradoxical in taking the non-decaying body as evidence for a consciousness that transcends the body and physicality. However, here we should be careful to note that in the Tibetan Buddhist tantric tradition different levels of mind are associated with different types of embodiment. Subtler forms of consciousness are associated with tantric subtle bodies or physiologies familiar to advanced tantric practitioners. As these are in a way two sides of the same coin, mind always affects body and vice versa. Such subtle bodies are arguably different from, though connected to, the "gross" biomedical body that scientists work with, which also shows effects of subtle levels of mind and embodiment.

Tibetan tradition exhibits a great deal of sophistication and specificity when it comes to signs or ways of ascertaining whether a person is in *tukdam*—as well as when it ends. The body will slump over if it was sitting upright; smell and normal signs of decomposition will appear. In accordance with subtle tantric physiology, red and white liquids may come out the nostrils and genitals. These are all signs that even the most subtle consciousness has departed. For Tibetans, final death occurs when the mind leaves the body, which could be weeks after clinical death in cases of *tukdam*, or hours to days for "normal" deaths.

There is also a tantalizing tradition of ending *tukdam* that could be seen as indicative of consciousness. If *tukdam* goes on too long, it may be ended by ringing a bell near the ear of the deceased practitioner, saying certain prayers, or asking them to end their meditation. The body then reportedly collapses and decomposition takes over. This could imply responsivity on the part of the deceased meditators, bearing on questions of consciousness.

People often report feeling a meditative calm or presence when entering the room of someone in *tukdam*. Some of the American scientists researching *tukdam* also said they felt it. But such things seem difficult to measure and to be firmly in the realm of first-person experience as opposed to the third-person observation of natural science. This does not, however, necessarily make such perceptions less real. As another Tukdam Project collaborator, senior Tibetan medicine doctor Tsewang Tamdin, told me, "Just because something is invisible does not mean it does not exist."

As in life and death, the dynamic of presence and absence is central to *tukdam*. Here we come to a basic conflict between the Tibetan Buddhist and current biomedical views of death. For the latter, death unequivocally means *absence*. Once the heart shuts down, brain death quickly follows—unless it's been inflicted before the heart stopped—and the person is gone. But for Tibetan Buddhists, there is *presence*, or mind, in death.

Attend a screening of *Tukdam: Between Worlds* at the Rubin Museum on April 28 and 29, 2023.

Donagh Coleman is a Finnish-Irish-American filmmaker. Previous award-winning documentaries with international festival and TV exposure include *Stone Pastures* and *A Gesar Bard's Tale*. Donagh's films have been shown by the European Commission and museums such as MoMA and the Rubin Museum. Donagh is currently doing a PhD in medical anthropology at UC Berkeley and holds degrees in philosophy and psychology and music and media technologies from Trinity College Dublin, as well as a master's in Asian studies from UC Berkeley.

A CAPACITY TO CHANGE

A TIBETAN IMMIGRANT REFLECTS ON THEIR GENDER TRANSITION

ILLUSTRATION BY TENZIN TSERING

BY *Tenzin Mingyur Paldron*

GROWING UP, I was a youth with a soft voice who used the women's restroom. It was the restroom society had assigned me. In it, I found myself repeatedly targeted by women who deemed me an unfit member of their group.

When I was born in South Asia in 1984, families like mine were permanently designated as refugees. This motivated my parents to try and raise me elsewhere. My mother wanted me to grow up in a society that prioritized equality, and she was especially fierce in her expectation that I not be dehumanized or discriminated against on the basis of my gender.

We reached the United States in 1989. Through my parents' sacrifices and the opportunities for equality created through the Civil Rights Movement, I became a US citizen in 1996 at the age of twelve.

I was seventeen when I began experiencing regular harassment in the women's restroom. My boyish appearance sometimes startled people. I navigated these encounters by smiling, speaking up, and offering identification if it came to that. I grew to observe that the sound of my voice was enough to dispel apprehension. Unfortunately, some women then chose to extend the interaction, despite knowing our bodies shared similar content. They would ridicule me, follow me, point me out to others, touch me, threaten me, and otherwise humiliate or hinder me.

Harassment is a decision, not an involuntary reaction. The women who treated me this way were making a statement about social membership. They viewed me as an unacceptable version of their gender, and therefore unentitled to share space with them.

During the time of these incidents I viewed myself as genderqueer or what could be described as non-binary, but the law held no protection for this identity. Choosing what felt right to me, I crossed the legal threshold between woman and man in 2010, at age twenty-five.

Upon learning of my decision to begin hormone therapy, my mother first responded with concern that I might get sick from the medication. Neither of my parents were used to medications or receiving physician care. I reassured her I was not harming myself and that being able to make these changes would bring me deep personal fulfillment.

Four years later it was 2014 and US society was talking about what had always been in its history—the existence of transgender people. Laverne Cox, a Hollywood actress and Black transgender woman, was the face of the story *Time* magazine called "The Transgender Tipping Point."

> "Some folks, they just don't understand. And they need to get to know us as human beings," she says. "Others are just going to be opposed to us forever. But I do believe in the humanity of people and in people's capacity to love and change." —Laverne Cox

My working-class Tibetan parents, immigrants from recently colonized Tibet, could have dismissed my gender transition as something unworthy of taking seriously. Instead, they drew upon decades of experience as refugees to understand the indignities and risk in store for me as a transgender person.

They are both intimately familiar with what it means to be legally and socially vulnerable—to have your paperwork and identity over-examined and easily rejected. And although they didn't know the specifics of my experience, my parents were familiar with the positive effects of love. They continued offering it to me without condition and chose to affirm my transition. In doing so they benefited my spirit tremendously.

My mother recognized my differences early on. Seeing the pain I felt in "girls" clothing, she shielded my self-expression from others' judgment and allowed me to grow.

"I don't 'try' to love you or 'try' to 'accept' you. If I did this it would not work well for me. Whether you are lesbian, or gay, or transgender, I just love you," she said in a phone call with me in 2016. "I choose you. You didn't get to choose me. I had a choice."

My father has also set a standard of care by not treating his support of me as a favor, but rather as a responsibility and joy. "Children are a parent's adornment," he once told me. "Just by existing, you add beauty to our lives like an ornament or jewel."

My parents' embrace of my transition reminds me of something a Korean American psychology professor told me. She said that when her LGBT students shared the pain of their identity and experience, she did not understand that specific pain. But she did know the pain of being a woman, of being an immigrant and a person of color. "I do know something about pain," she said. "And it is from this place I can listen and learn."

This professor used her identity and experience as a cisgender woman to connect with others, not exclude them. I hope more people do the same.

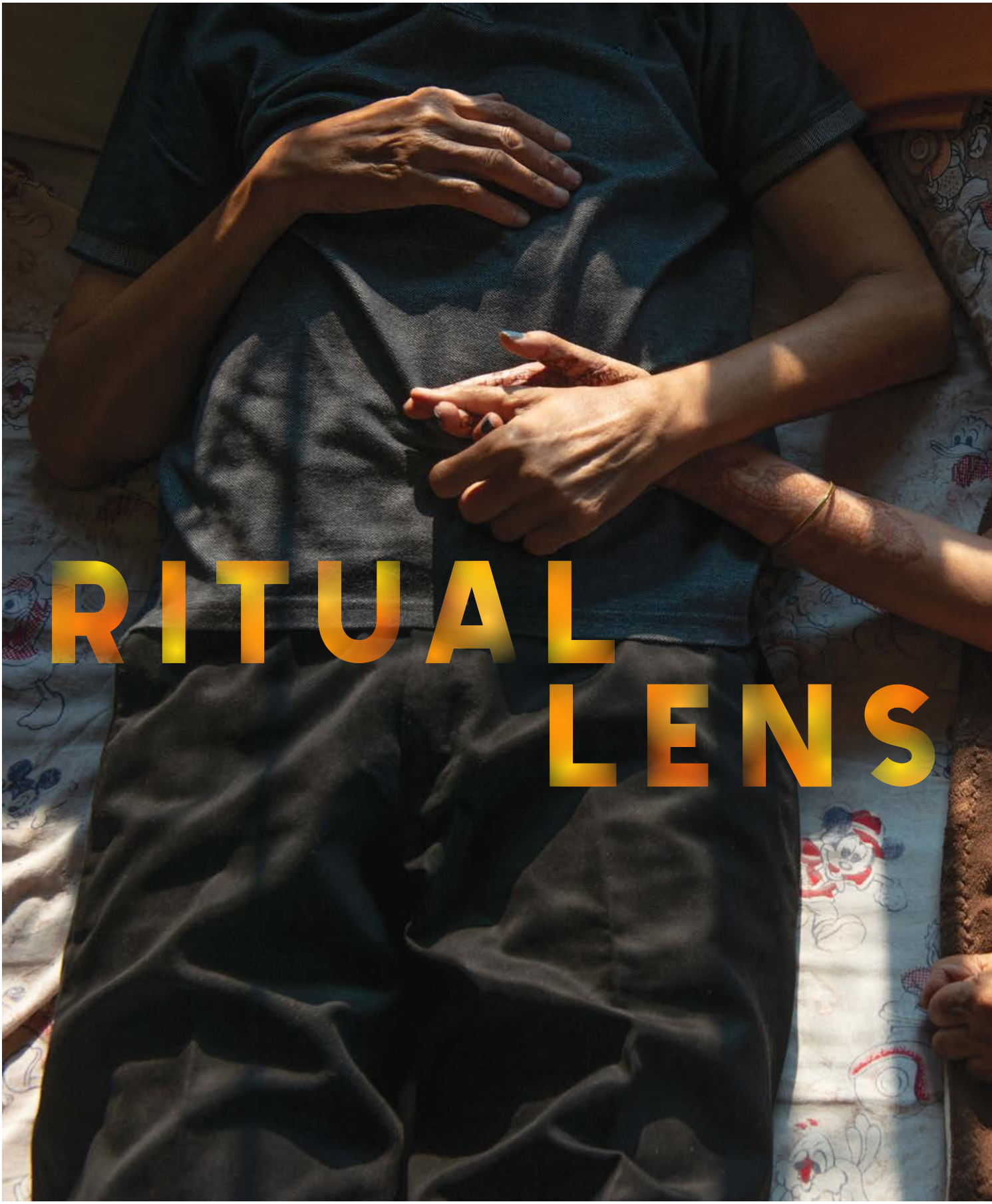
Our shared quality of life is linked to policy as much as individual acts. As the US looks into whether it will grant my community full membership, I would like to speak to the reader who has a vote in this debate.

Some people like to act as though transgender and non-binary are made-up identities. Influential figures treat us as objects of derision and harbingers of danger. But all our existence does is point to the fact that there is more to gender and sex than you might think. The world is not flat—it has depth. It always has.

Those who are not interested in our equality resort to dehumanizing tactics. They pick apart our bodies whether we are young or old, and insist that no matter what chromosomes cannot be changed.

History can't be changed either. But that's why we have things like healing and justice; because we deserve the chance to change from our past. To know what life after might be like.

Tenzin Mingyur Paldron (he/they) is an artist and educator in New York City. He has a PhD in Rhetoric from UC Berkeley and wrote the dissertation *Tibet, China, and the United States: Self-immolation and the limits of understanding* (2021). He recently collaborated with Soojin Chang on a multimedia installation and is developing a memoir, *Transgender Road Diaries: A Tibetan Adventure*. He works with Tibetan Equality Project and welcomes support and inquiries at paldron.com.



RITUAL LENS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MANJARI SHARMA

A daughter documents her mother's decline and the Hindu rites around death and mourning

BY *Manjari Sharma*

IN THE DEAD OF THE COLD WINTER of January 2012, my spiritual guide, my mother, flew from Mumbai to New York City so she could hold my hand as I birthed my daughter. That same week I started to note that my passionate, expressive mother seemed uncharacteristically distant, unusually detached, and unpredictably moody for a new grandma. In the six months that followed, my mother's brilliant mind completely disassembled. At the age of sixty, Kiran Sharma was diagnosed with an early onset of Frontotemporal Dementia. She quickly lost her ability to speak, and my father's singular purpose became to provide her with selfless home care.

As I navigated the cruel timing of my mother's illness in parallel with my new motherhood, I began to make pictures of what was unfolding before my eyes. I would grip my camera, draw it close to my face, cradle its familiar contours so I could depress the trigger, and freeze everything at will. This ritual comforted me. I knew I couldn't change my mother's destiny, but sometimes the act of taking a photograph cheated me into believing that I was slowing it down.

I believed in my heart like a desperate fool that if my mother could speak, she would reveal all the great wisdom she was accumulating. My guru, after all, had to be leaving me some signs about her silver lining. If I looked hard enough through the camera and within the photographs, I thought I might find the clues. I practiced my ritual during every trip to India over the course of ten years.

My interest in ritual was inspired by the teachings of my mother, who was deeply invested in her spiritual development. She believed that we as individuals are miniatures of the universe itself.

The goal of her practice was to experience this divine synchronicity within and beyond. She read, meditated, chanted, and practiced yoga. She was chasing a soul awakening that would liberate her from material attachment and bestow upon her freedom from the karmic cycle of rebirth.

After a decade-long battle with the disease, my mother took her last breath on August 9, 2022.

As per the *Garuda Purana*, a sacred Hindu text that addresses issues of death, funeral rites, and the metaphysics of reincarnation, after a death the family enters a period called *sutak*, or mourning. They renounce daily life activities for twelve days.

Hindu culture believes that a part of a person lives on after their death. To ensure that this part enters the land of the dead, the descendants must perform the necessary ceremonies. On completion of these rituals, the dead gain the status of *pitru*, or ancestor. Otherwise they remain in the land of the living as *preta*, a ghost hunting for closure.

On the first day we bathed my mother's body and placed it on the ground with her head pointing north and feet pointing south. Since my father was alive, my mother was still a married woman, which meant she would leave this world just as she was decorated as a bride. My aunts draped my mother in a red and gold saree and bejeweled her with a red bindi on her third eye. Then my dad dropped down to the floor to put a *mangal sutra*, a necklace and symbol of marital status, around her neck. The only other time he publicly performed this ritual was at their wedding.

According to the Indian conception of the universe, the cosmos is a continuum. Like a circle or a void, the universal order presents in uninterrupted continuity. While there are phases in this order, no phase is absolute in itself. Each contains all the parts of the whole. The significance of a ritual at all levels is holistic.

Preparations for the *shav yatra*, journey of the deceased, entailed building a ladder-like contraption with bamboo and rope, which became the bed for my mother's body to be carried to the ambulance. During a small prayer ceremony, we showered

my mother with shawls to keep her body warm and garlanded her many times so she would remain surrounded by fragrance.

In the ambulance, the pandit (priest) gave me a handful of flowers, holy basil, rice puffs, and small sugary treats to throw out of the window. Watching those flowers blow and wither away into the wind felt appropriate. This custom occurs so other restless spirits that may envy the procession feel validated and honored.

The enactment and performance of these death rituals propelled me toward an unexpected spiritual state. I felt a synchronicity, a oneness with the universe, and it did not descend from "above" but rather felt like an illumination or a swell from within.

The chief goal of ritual worship is to experience this order. To feel the interrelation of all phenomena, or to transition from an egocentric to a cosmocentric outlook by merging the self into the whole through a dynamic process of awakening.

The greater the intensity of the ritual experience, the higher the spiritual growth will be until the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth comes to an end. Ritual has the power to vanquish the fear of death and transcend death in the experience of life's unity.

At the cremation ground, there was a prayer and set of rituals to prepare my mother's body so the flames would graciously receive her. We layered her with ghee and sandalwood shavings, and decorated her body with the three types of ayurvedic old-world perennial grasses representing purity, rejuvenation, and immortality.

The pandit made a hole in a clay pot filled with water, which my brother carried on his shoulder. My brother circled our mother as the water drained from the pot. I grew up watching this ritual in Bollywood movies, yet suddenly it carried meaning like never before. It felt tribal. With every circle my brother drew with his body around my mom, I thought of her life, womb, birth, and death.

Antiyesti, or cremation, means the "last sacrifice." We give ourselves and our bodies to the fire, which is the eternal host of all human beings. This is the last of the Hindu sacraments designed to ensure the journey of the departed soul in the next world.

Despite all the wisdom my mother imparted to me through her spiritual quests, nothing in my life could have ever prepared me for when the flames took my mother's body. The finality of that moment was unbearable.

The next day we returned to the crematorium for a ritual called Asti Kalash, where we picked out my mother's *astis* (bones) from the ash. Colloquially this is also called Phool Chun na, which translates to "picking out the flowers." What an incredible metaphor, I thought. To someone else, it may look like a pile of human bones, but to me, they were precious remains of my mother worthy of worship.

My brother, my father, a few of my uncles, and I performed the washing of the bones. The meaning of family was more real than reality itself. These were people I grew up with and shared many a celebratory hug, but today they sat on the floor with me to hold my hand and pack my mother's remains. Ritual by ritual, I felt transformed.

On the sixth day, we took my mother's remains to the city of Nasik, where many of my ancestors' final rights had been performed. Upon arrival on the banks of the Godavari River, my father uttered my grandfather's name, Tilak Raj Sharma, and within minutes, multiple priests were looking through delicate handwritten location-tagged logs called the Bhrigu Shastra. These records contain the names of every person who traveled to these banks for their Asti Visarjan, or immersion. A frenzied crowd surrounded us, but amidst the chaos, a priest said, "Are you the descendent of Agyaram Sharma?" This was the name of my paternal great-grandfather. I am still puzzled by the speed

My mother's body had now wholly returned to its five elements: fire, wind, soil, water, and sky.

with which we found our priest, but the single goal of priests hovering around these pilgrimage sites is to reconnect with the families they are meant to karmically and ancestrally perform these final rights for.

This priest's life was tied to ours by way of death. He was somehow connected to my great-grandfather, my grandfather, my grandmother, and my aunt. Now he would perform final rites for my mother. My brother and I walked through the gushing water and were ushered onto a platform where we held hands with my father, chanted, and released my mother's *astis* into the water.

Rituals work on the assumption that nothing, however small and insignificant or vastly incomprehensible, is without significance to our destiny in this ever-moving world. My mother's body had now wholly returned to its five elements: fire, wind, soil, water, and sky.

On the tenth day was a ritual called Pindadaan. Much to my surprise, we met in a location that looked unkempt, raw, and gritty. After the previous day's soul-cleansing experience with the water, I was disappointed.

Our pandit said, "Today we will be conducting a prayer ceremony that symbolically focuses on her 'birth' and figuratively brings her back to life." We were meeting in this location because birth is gritty and messy. I was asked to make a dough from rice flour, ghee, and black sesame seeds. As I pressed into the dough, I thought of the countless times my mom kneaded fresh dough to make me roti. I then rolled the dough into sixteen balls, known as *pindas*. Ten of them would symbolically represent parts of her body and act as a medium to reconstruct her in our mind so she could begin her journey to reunite with her ancestors. The remaining six symbolized the food she would need for nourishment for this transformation and journey.

We decorated each of these *pindas*, creating an abundance of beauty through texture and harmony to nourish our imaginations and broken hearts.

With my mother now symbolically resurrected, our period of mourning had officially ended.

The final act, the Sapindi, involved another fire ceremony and our pandit asked me to make sixteen *pindas* again. My mother, in this newly revived form, would now begin a yearlong *yatra*, or journey, to reach *moksha*, or heaven. The journey would be long and tiresome, and my mother would halt at sixteen different villages where she would need food and

care that we as a family would provide. The *pindas* represented these sixteen resting points, and this entire ritual represented her new life and spiritual journey onward. My father would now feed and care for my mother once a month by way of donating food to another woman her age. This woman will symbolically eat on behalf of my mother.

Drawing invisible lines of connection between my mother and us, we lifted my mother's photograph to take in her blessings and asked my mother to leave her imprint on our hearts. The priest chanted an invocation that summoned all five types of wind that entered us through our eyes, nose, ears, mouth, and mind. These rituals made me feel cosmically united with my mother in the most elemental of ways. My father, in that moment, said, "I feel that Kiran is in us and with us."

In twelve days, we had cremated my mother, handpicked out her precious bones, immersed her into sacred waters, rebirthed and re-manifested her spirit in our minds, and invoked and activated her journey onward.

Despite being born and raised in India and being deeply connected to my mother's thirst for spiritual knowledge, I stood in complete awe of the transformation I experienced through the lens of these Hindu rituals. Thank you, mother, for teaching me that the silver lining of the silver lining is to seek and seek because our evolution is eternal.

Manjari Sharma makes art that addresses issues of memory, identity, multiculturalism, and personal mythology. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Vice*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Huffington Post*, CNN, and NPR, and her art is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Carlos Museum, and Birmingham Museum of Art. Originally from Mumbai, she now lives in Los Angeles.

Everything Changes for the Better

by Howard Kaplan

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF BEING STATELESS

Tenzin Wangyal and his partners specialize in immigration law and work primarily with the Himalayan community in Queens, New York, in bustling neighborhoods like Jackson Heights and Woodside that have become home to immigrants from Nepal, Tibet, and India. They help their clients navigate the legal process of transitioning from being undocumented to hopefully gaining status in the United States. Tenzin and his team act like guides, helping those who are new to the country understand how it works. While the lawyers educate their clients on the ins and outs of becoming a citizen, they are also able to show the judges and government agencies what it's like to be a person without a country, to be stateless.

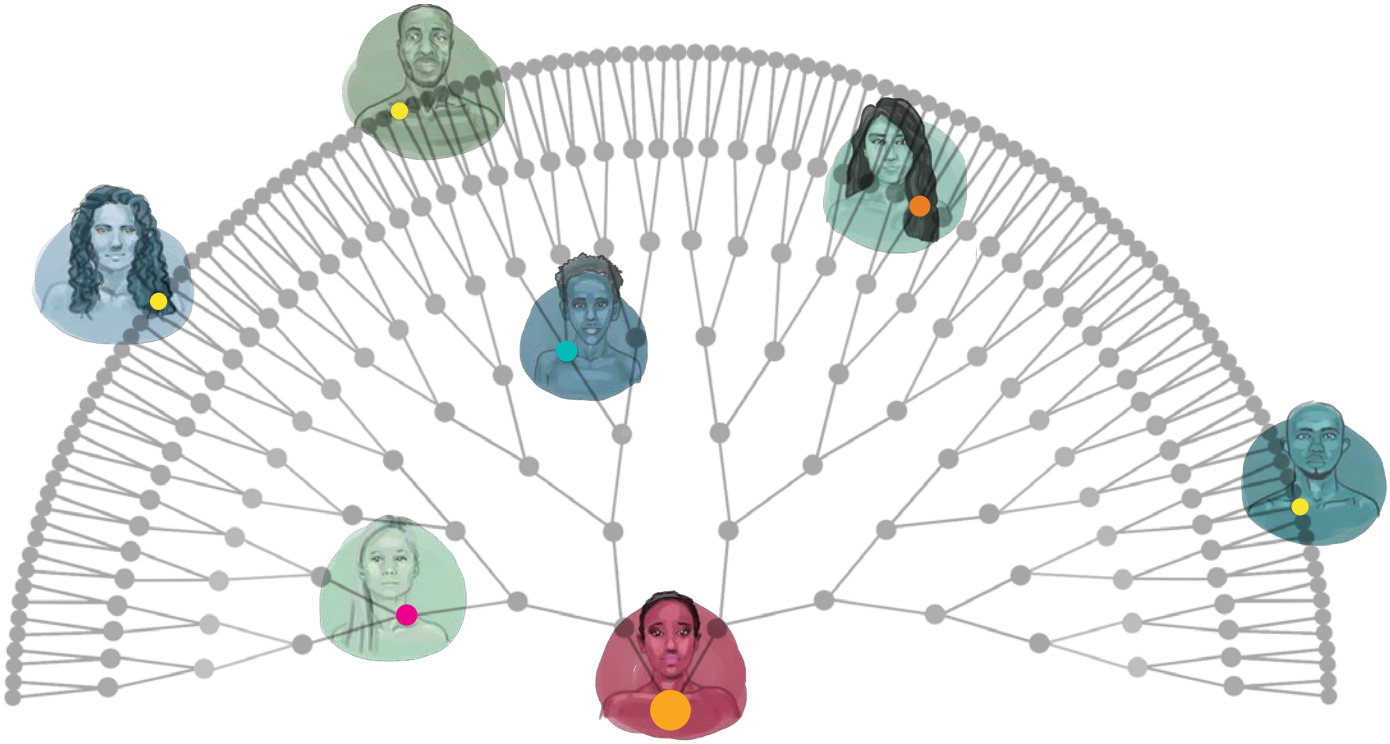
"What's most gratifying about the job is that we're difference makers," Tenzin says. "And we're kind of indispensable in the lives of our clients. It's often a fraught journey filled with a high degree of randomness and uncertainty." Two people could file together, and one person will get approved within five months while the other person's case will remain pending for five years. Even if both cases were filed on the same day, it could go in different directions, because they get assigned to different offices and different judges. This long process often takes a toll on people physically and mentally. There are also cultural differences. In Asia, they may have been taught to be soft spoken and respectful, but these qualities could be mistaken for a lack of confidence when standing before a judge.

Years after helping someone, Tenzin often runs into them in the Tibetan Hall, a community center in Woodside, or at an event. Former clients will bring their children to meet Tenzin and introduce him as the attorney who worked on their case, telling them "because of his work, you're here in the United States." For Tenzin, the most gratifying part of the process is sitting down with a client once they've been given permanent status in the country. "At that moment, everything changes for the better. They can reunify with their families. It's the best moment."

One memorable case involved a young man and his mother, both refugees from Tibet, who were referred to Tenzin's firm by a nonprofit. The young man was a musician with a severe disability. Tenzin and his colleagues took on their case pro bono. After several years, both mother and son were granted status. The young man even performed a song at Tenzin's daughter's first birthday party, singing for a grateful audience of hundreds. Perhaps no one was more grateful than the overjoyed lawyer sitting close to the stage, who was able to help the man singing become an American permanent resident.

Tenzin Wangyal is an immigration lawyer serving Himalayan communities in Queens, New York.

FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS



On the afterlife of generational trauma

BY *Lara Tambacopoulou*

THE AFTERMATH of intergenerational trauma often sits silently and invisibly in the crevices of a family, presenting itself as recurring patterns of inappropriate or impulsive actions or feelings, chronic and potentially fatal illnesses or injuries, and an inability to reach contentment and fulfilment, even among those who are chronologically far removed from the initial traumatic events.

Family or systemic constellations is a method that attempts to uncover hidden relational dynamics within a family history with the intent of addressing the triggers and rebalancing the family system. Often the issues stem from events that have been too traumatic for the family system to carry: war and genocide, forced migration, sudden deaths, abortion and miscarriage, adoption, suicide, unresolved relationships, the rejection or banishment of a family member who committed a crime or is mentally ill. The afflicted generation might use exclusion and disconnection from this history as a means of coping, but these missing parts of the story can then reverberate down the generations and emerge intact in the life of a later member as unexplained, persistent mysteries.

DIAGRAM FROM THE CENTRE FOR SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS UK / HARPER D'AMECOURT

Exclusion brings fragmentation to the self and the system it belongs to, and it requires an overwhelming expenditure of energy to maintain this psychic oblivion. When the invisible aspects are revealed and the trauma is integrated into the wider systemic story, its grip on the family eases and trapped life energy is freed.

The Origin

Bert Hellinger (1925–2019), the founder of systemic constellations, was a German Catholic priest who worked for several years as a missionary with the Zulus of South Africa, where his interest in group dynamics grew. In the 1960s he participated in a series of interracial and ecumenical trainings that acquainted him with the power of phenomenology—a way of sensing and allowing our perceptions to surface in a clear, deep, present manner, circumventing our own interpretations.

These experiences planted the seed for his subsequent departure from the Catholic church, and phenomenology became the bedrock of family constellation work. Hellinger developed this method in the early 1980s after returning to Germany and training in psychoanalysis, Gestalt therapy, hypnotherapy, and more.

For Hellinger a phenomenological orientation could shed direct light onto what has been hidden from collective ideologies and family rules of belonging. He became fascinated by its ability to cut through and uncover untold truths, remaining objective and available to what wants to be seen and acknowledged, while weeding away preconceptions, judgments, diversity, fear, and anger. In postwar Germany, descendants of Nazi perpetrators and Jewish survivors needed a method that could transcend tragedy and make space for allowing respectful reconciliation. Family constellations proposed such a means by enabling people to face fateful truths in reverence and in service to future life.

How Does It Work?

A person who comes to explore an issue is the portal to their family system. They are usually seeking relief for recurrent patterns that have no apparent roots. The goal of a constellation session is to reveal what is hidden and give it its rightful place in the family system. From there, all can flow effortlessly, and the individual can begin to live a life free of ancestral burden waiting to be resolved.

Hellinger observed how a family system—which he often referred to as family soul—is like a mobile, and in order to maintain its balance, every member must belong, occupy their rightful place and engage in the ebb and flow of fair and equal give and take. When a family member from a previous generation has been banished from the family's conscious awareness, a relative from a subsequent generation may have the impulse to fill the gap and unconsciously carry their fate. These people may not feel or act quite like themselves. Once this unconscious entanglement with someone in their system is brought to light, they can find a resolution and move toward liberation.

In a group session, the facilitator will ask the seeker to choose one of the participants to "represent" themselves and select others to stand in for certain members of their family. The seeker then places these people in the space. When the representatives, who are not known to the issue holder, tune in to their body sensations and intuition, they usually get in touch with and report with eerie accuracy feelings and information that belong to those they represent, regardless of whether those people are still alive. The representative needs only to observe and report their own sensations free of their interpretations.

Here is an example: A man seeking help for chronic pain in his right leg attended a session. The facilitator asked him to choose people from the group to represent members of his family going back three generations. The man complied but said he could not remember the name of his grandfather, because no one talked about him—he had left the family when the man's father was very young. Nonetheless, the man asked someone to stand in for the unknown grandfather. The person who assumed the role said he had difficulty walking, and gradually he sensed acute pain in his right leg. The issue holder began to weep, recounting that he had heard once that the grandfather had left the family after an accident where he lost his right leg. No longer able to work to support them, he left out of shame, although it was perceived as abandonment and buried. The man had stepped into his grandfather's place out of a pull to complete the family. The facilitator then suggested the man speak words of acknowledgement to the grandfather about what had taken place and ask for permission to return this fate back to the grandfather where it rightfully belongs, so the man could then live free of this predicament.

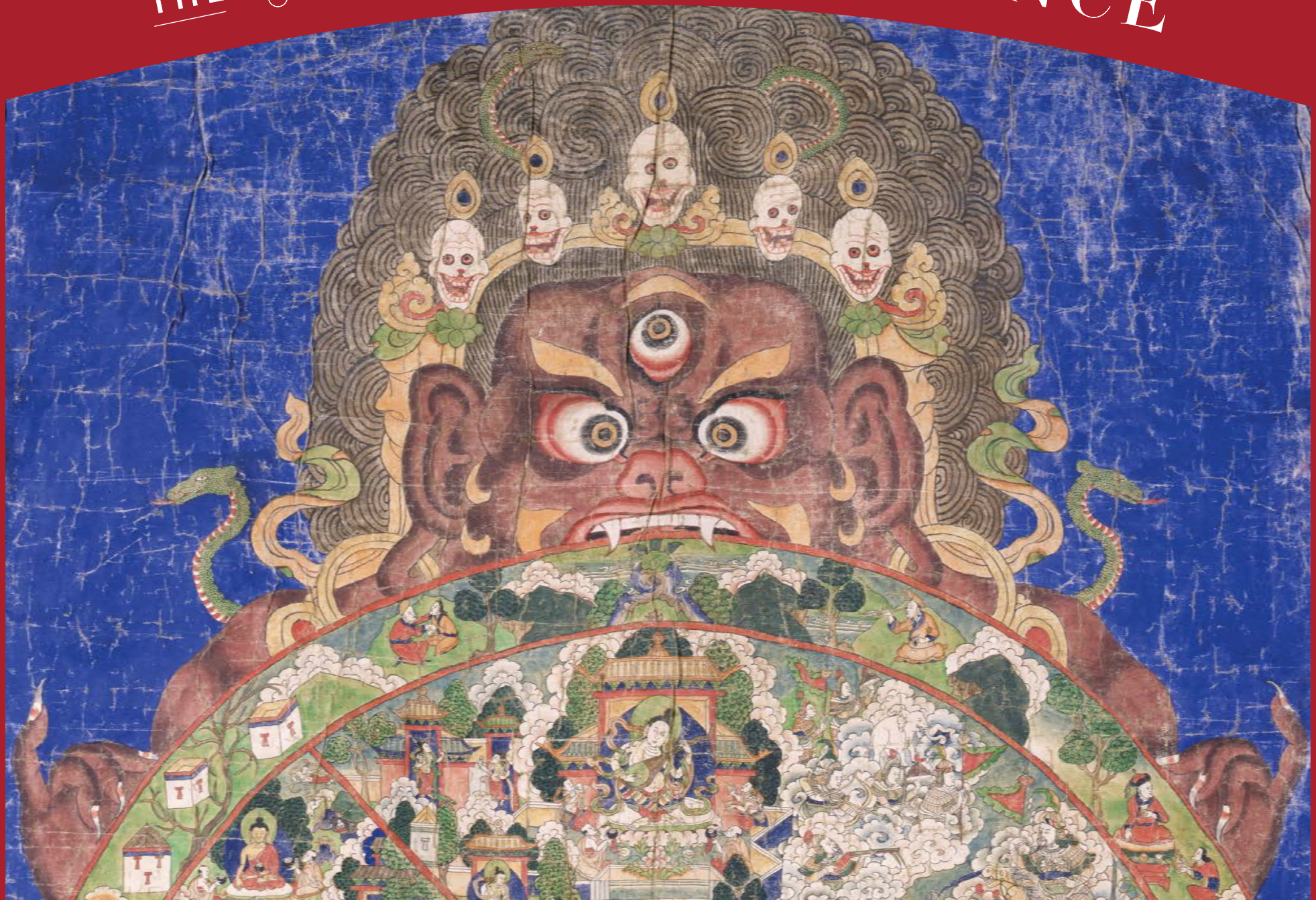
This concept of representation has triggered much skepticism, but scientists like Rupert Sheldrake have pointed to "morphic fields" as an explanation for how the past gets transmitted into the present. Morphic resonance involves the relaying of information and memories across time and space in a cumulative manner. Sheldrake and others believe that events are stored in nature, not in our brains, which instead act as transmitters and receivers.

Hellinger recognized that for a system to flow it must follow three natural laws, which he coined "orders of love." First, everyone in a family system has an equal right to belong. Second, everyone occupies their right place in the hierarchy of the system, and the order of precedence is dictated by the time of belonging. Third, exchanges between family members or couples must maintain an equal give and take.

The orders are invisible to most but point to solutions that can restore one's well-being. When the members of a system are aligned with the orders, they are guided by peace and strength, which allows love and intimacy to flow unobstructed and the original life force to spring from its source across and down the generations.

Lara Tambacopoulou is a peer counselor from UBC and a Systemic Constellations facilitator trained at the Centre for Systemic Constellations in the United Kingdom. She conducts group and individual sessions in person and online. Lara is also the host of Future Primitive Podcasts, where she holds conversations with modern thinkers, visionaries, and innovators. She lives between London and Athens and can be reached at lara@futureprimive.org.

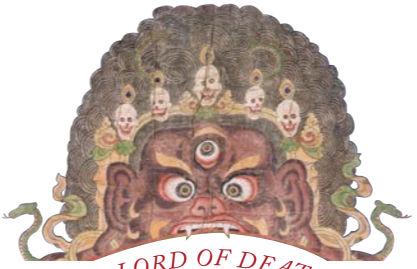
THE WHEEL OF EXISTENCE



THE Wheel OF Existence

by Elena Pakhoutova

THE WHEEL OF EXISTENCE, or Wheel of Life, is a representation of Buddhist beliefs about the cycle of life, death, and rebirth known as samsara. Past actions (karma) are the force that keeps beings within this cyclic existence. The central hub that makes the wheel rotate is the ultimate cause of samsara. The rim that holds the wheel together consists of states of consciousness in the process of rebirth. The whole of existence is depicted between these two parts of the wheel.



5: LORD OF DEATH

The Lord of Death holds the wheel of existence in his mouth and claws, reminding us that all life is conditioned by death. There is no escape from death until one reaches a complete understanding of reality, or awakening.

Wheel of Life; Tibet or Mongolia; 19th century; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin; C2006.66.131 (HAR 78)

1: THREE POISONS

At the center of the wheel are the three "poisons" that trap all beings in samsara. Three animals that chase each other's tails represent these main roots of suffering. Beginning at the bottom and moving clockwise, a pig symbolizes ignorance; a snake stands for anger or hatred; and a rooster represents desire or attachment.

4: TWELVE LINKS OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

This ring symbolically depicts a consciousness being reborn. It arises in dependence on the root causes of samsara and its preceding mental states.

1. Ignorance (blind person)
2. Volition, creation (potter)
3. Consciousness (monkey)
4. Name and form (two people in a boat)
5. Six senses (empty houses)
6. Contact, touch (a couple hugging)
7. Feelings, sensations (arrow in a person's eye)
8. Craving, desire (person drinking)
9. Grasping/clinging (person gathering fruit)
10. Becoming (pregnant woman)
11. Birth (woman giving birth)
12. Old age, death (old person with a corpse)

3: REALMS OF EXISTENCE

This section depicts the six realms where beings are born propelled by their karma. Each realm has its own conditions of life that determine experiences of reality. Some are more suitable to creating good karma, and others are full of suffering. Anyone can be born in any of the realms.

A. Realm of the Gods
B. Realm of Demigods (Asura)
C. Human Realm
D. Animal Realm
E. Hungry Ghosts Realm
F. Hell Realm

2: LIGHT AND DARK: UP AND DOWN

The bisected circle represents virtuous and non-virtuous actions (karma). In the light half, people are moving up towards good rebirths, because of their good karma. In the dark half, figures are moving down, because they still must exhaust their bad karma before they can have a better rebirth.

See The Wheel of Existence on view in the exhibition *Death Is Not the End* at the Rubin Museum from March 17, 2023–January 14, 2024.

Elena Pakhoutova is senior curator, Himalayan art, at the Rubin Museum of Art.

How to Like Mondays

by Howard Kaplan

Joseph Liu spent much of his early life preparing to become a doctor, but once he entered the Georgetown School of Medicine in Washington, DC, at the age of twenty-four, he realized that becoming a physician was no longer the right path for him to follow. After two weeks, he dropped out. "I decided to cut my losses, figure out what I really wanted to do, and more importantly, make room for another pursuit. Making that choice was tough. It was the scariest, most counterintuitive decision I'd made up to that point in my life."

He also didn't have a back-up plan, so leaving school without a defined goal sent him straight into a series of jobs that included temping at a law firm, working in health policy consulting, and even teaching salsa dance lessons at a Cuban night club for a while. After eventually getting his MBA and marketing consumer goods for a few years, he still wasn't quite sure where he would ultimately land professionally.

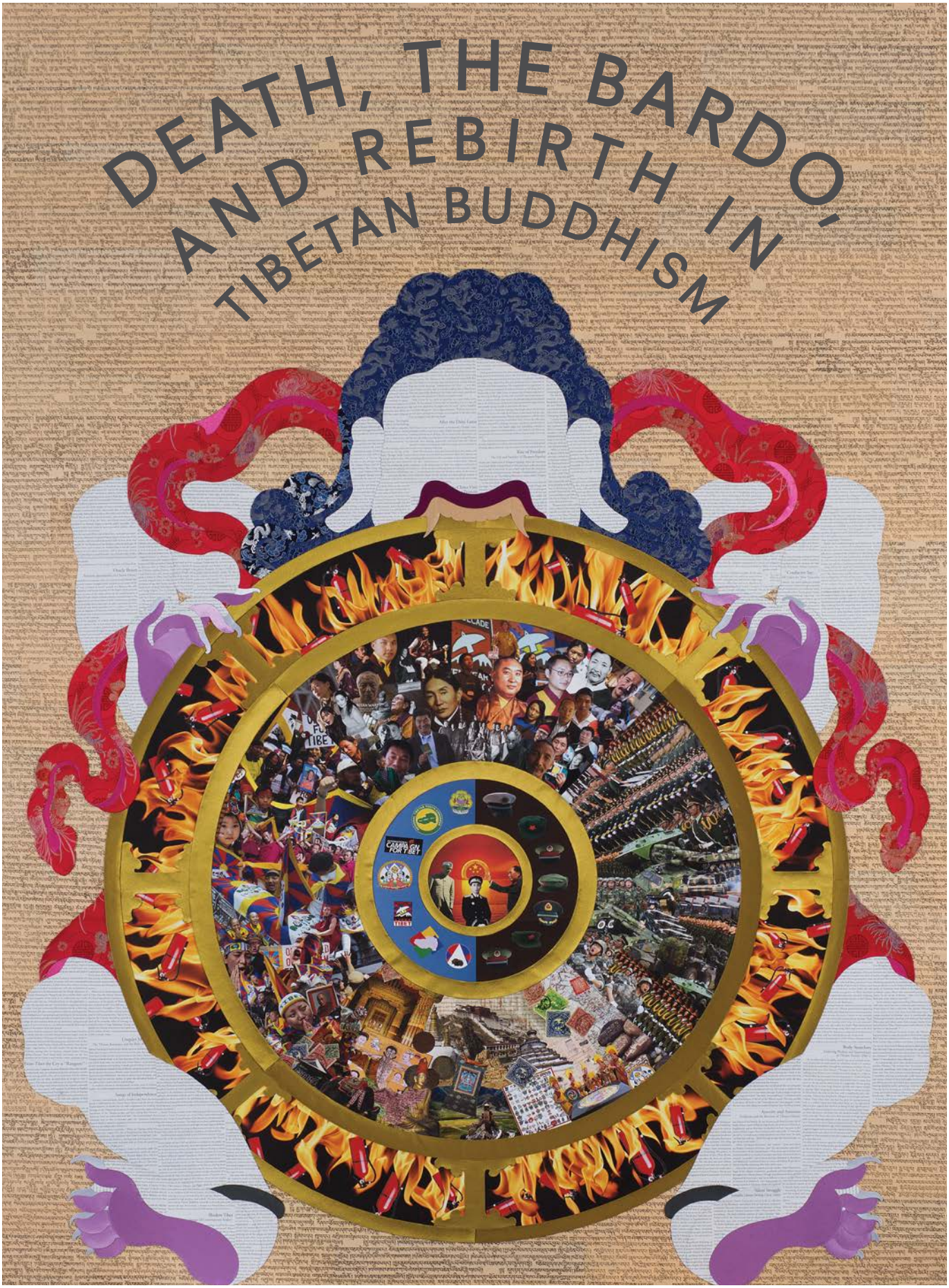
After moving to London to be with his future wife and marketing luxury desserts for a few more years, he eventually began his consultancy work to help people, often mid-career, find more fulfilling work. In addition to his roles as a speaker, career advisor, and writer, he hosts the *Career Relaunch*® podcast, where he interviews guests about their often-unexpected career transitions. These include an army sniper who pursued his love of the sleight of hand and became a magician, and a professional tennis player who traded in her racquet for literal trading on Wall Street.

"Transitions are hard," Joseph says. "The process may be emotionally draining at times, but the fact that it's challenging shouldn't stop you." A couple of years ago Joseph helped a client who worked as a staffing supervisor in the Bay Area. "When she first came to me," Joseph shares, "she was unhappy, both personally and professionally. She dreaded Mondays. Her work was misaligned with her values, and she was depleted by the end of the day." She spoke to Joseph about the regrets she didn't want to have when she would look back on her life. Her family is from Asia, so she made the decision to move with her family from northern California to the other side of the world. "She's a lot happier now, working as an independent HR consultant, very much at home in both her professional and personal lives, spending more time with her children and old friends."

"If you feel you have the choice, and not everybody does," Joseph adds, "you really owe it to yourself to work in a way that matches your natural interests and skills. You'll then transition from tolerating your job to actually enjoying it. And when that happens, you can go from dreading Mondays to looking forward to them."

Joseph Liu is a London-based career consultant and host of the *Career Relaunch*® podcast.

DEATH, THE BARDO, AND REBIRTH IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM



ARTWORK BY TENZING RIGDOL

How the mind navigates the passage between death and rebirth

BY

Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

ALL OF US ARE ACCUSTOMED to living in our body, having been on this earth now for some time, so when death comes and we leave this body, we will face a big transition. In Tibetan the word for body is *lu*, which literally means "what's left behind." What we do not leave behind is our consciousness, which travels onward through the bardo—the intermediate state—to a new life.

The actions and deeds of our life heavily influence how our consciousness experiences this transition and where it travels to next. These actions have shaped our mind, and this shaping process is known in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions as karma. Karma is the momentum or energy that propels us through the bardo to find a new birth.

The bardo has two phases. In the first, your consciousness struggles to understand what has happened, slowly coming to realize that you have left your body and died. In the bardo, your mind occupies a mental body, but you may not yet have come to grips with that fact. Initially, you feel the same as you did while on this earth, and to prove that to yourself, you undertake activities such as jumping off a cliff or stepping into a fire. In this world, jumping off a cliff would lead to pain and broken bones, while stepping into a fire would cause serious burns. In the bardo, after you jump you discover your bones don't break. When you step into a fire, you do not burn. This confirms that you have died and are in the intermediate state. Tremendous grief arises, especially if due to strong attachments in your previous life, you didn't spend time contemplating and accepting impermanence and death.

With no physical body to limit your consciousness in the bardo, it is said that you can read the minds of others and perceive their emotional states. You can tell if they are experiencing well-being or pain, if they are feeling love and care for you, or if they have fallen into their own self-absorption. When you see their pain and loss, you draw close to your relatives and attempt to comfort them by saying, "Do not grieve, I am here." But they cannot hear or see you, which provokes more of your own grief. When you observe the love and care your relatives once had for you fade, you feel immensely alienated and alone.

Sometimes conflict arises among your children or relatives over the little bit of money you earned with your own blood, sweat, and tears. To witness their disagreement causes you much pain and sadness. These leftover experiences of the previous life constitute the first half of the forty-nine days of the bardo.

In the second half, flashes of where you will be born in your next life begin to occur. This world will be unfamiliar to you. Nevertheless, as these flashes become more frequent, you gravitate toward them. In the bardo, the mind is flighty and unstable, darting around with great speed in a state of groundlessness. These flashes therefore appear to you as a refuge and a ground. From a deep impulse to find a home, you begin to turn toward your next birth as that home.

Depending on your karma, you are drawn to one of six realms. If it's the human realm, you see your future mother and father making love, and as the egg and sperm come together, you look for an entry point. The teachings say that if you are to be born as a boy, there will be some aggression toward the father and attachment toward the mother. For a girl, it is the opposite; there will be aggression toward the mother and attachment toward the father. This attachment and aggression are part of what propels you to enter into your mother's womb.

I believe that these tendencies in the bardo may account for why a father and son can have a challenging relationship, as can a mother and daughter. That point is not stated in the teachings explicitly, yet I imagine these dynamics may start before conception and influence the biological gender of the child. When we enter the mother's womb, the mind forms in some fundamental ways, so it is traditional in Tibet to begin counting one's age at the point of conception rather than birth.

You may be reborn in the animal, hungry ghost, or hell realms. To the degree that you have accumulated negative karma by living a life in which you have harmed other beings, you will find yourself in one of these "lower" realms. If your life consisted of working to be of benefit to other living beings, you will be born in the "higher" realms of humans, demigods, or gods. In this sense, our karma more or less automatically determines where we take our next birth.

If you are a practitioner and have spent your life meditating, then you have familiarized yourself with your space-like nature. At the time of the dissolution of this body and its elements, you will meet with a great opportunity to become fully awakened by recognizing the primordial ground, the nature of mind. With this deep stability in your mind and based upon your *bodhicitta*—the unconditional love and care you have developed toward all living beings—combined with a pure altruistic motivation, you can then choose to be born again to live a life of service to others and be of benefit to the world.

Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche was recognized by his root guru, Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa as a reincarnation of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye. Rinpoche's father was the third incarnation of tertön Chokgyur Lingpa, while his first teacher, his mother, Tsewang Paldon, was a renowned practitioner, completing thirteen years of retreat. In 1989 Rinpoche moved to the West and began a five-year tenure at Naropa University as the first holder of the World Wisdom Chair. During that time Rinpoche founded Mangala Shri Bhuti, an organization dedicated to establishing a genuine sangha of the Longchen Nyingtik lineage in the West.

DRAW BRIDGE

A simple art exercise can reveal insights into how you navigate life transitions

BY *Ikuko Acosta*

THE BASIS OF ART THERAPY PRACTICE lies in two beliefs: our human nature to see the visual world in a subjective fashion and the inherent power of creative expression. Creating an image or object by reproducing and interpreting our everyday outer world is a form of personal expression filled with unique symbolism that reveals facets of our inner world.

This simple art exercise may provide some insight into yourself, using the metaphor of a bridge to explore how you manage change and transitions from one realm of life to another.

RATIONALE

The image of a bridge can be a symbolic expression of your unique way of managing any kind of transition, such as moving from childhood to adolescence, getting married, becoming a parent, a mid-life career change, retirement, and eventually the end of life.

MATERIALS

- The blank page here or white drawing paper of any size close to 18 x 24 inches
- Oil pastels, crayons, paints, or any other kind of coloring materials

PROCESS

Find a comfortable, well-lit space with minimum distractions and no time restrictions. Draw an image of a bridge in any way you wish using your oil pastels or crayons. No artistic skill is required—focus on free self-expression. After you complete the drawing, place a small dot of any color in any part of the image to represent your placement. There is no right or wrong way of doing this exercise.

Draw your bridge here.

INTERPRETATION

KEEP IN MIND there is no single way or correct way to interpret an image based on a formulaic and generalized preconception (for instance, "black means depression" or "sharp teeth means aggression"). Each image must be understood through the mood and emotional state of the person who created it in that moment, as well as in the context of their past personal experience.

In art therapy practice, the art therapist has the privilege of knowing the person and witnessing their whole creative process, which helps the therapist interpret the created artwork. For this art exercise, however, you are creating an image of a bridge by yourself, so I offer generalized guidelines that you can apply to understand your drawing and its symbolic meanings. Do not read the interpretation guideline questions below until after you've finished drawing. Use the prompts to understand the connection between the expressed image and your inner state.

GUIDELINE QUESTIONS

1. *What materials is the bridge made of? For instance, steel, wood, stone, logs?*

Implications: Is the bridge solid enough, secure enough, and safe enough to cross? Do you feel your transitional process is based on solid and safe circumstances? Do you have solid support from friends and family?

2. *How long is the bridge? Does the bridge connect one place to another?*

Implications: How long could this transitional period last? Does this transition have a specific end goal or desired destination, or is it an unknown and unpredictable journey?

3. *What kind of bridge is it? Is it a straight road, arch shape, have many steps, or lack support, like a swinging rope bridge?*

Implications: What are the potential challenges and dangers of crossing this bridge? Is your transitional phase difficult, requiring concentration, planning, and extra caution or effort?

4. *What is beneath the bridge? Soft grass, calm water, a rough river, or a highway with heavy traffic?*

Implications: What would happen if you fell off the bridge? Would you land in a safe or dangerous place? Do you feel that you have a safety net should you encounter difficulty while going through this transition?

5. *Is there any environment surrounding the bridge, and if so, what is it like? Is it sunny with trees and many living things or cloudy and deserted?*

Implication: The overall mood of the environment may reflect your general emotional state while going through the transition. There is nothing wrong if you did not draw the environment, but sometimes life changes are closely impacted by the surrounding circumstances.

6. *Where did you place yourself in the image, as represented by the dot? Are you on the bridge, and if so, which part? Are you at the beginning, middle, or toward the end?*

Implications: If you placed yourself at the beginning, are you anticipating a life change? Or are you halfway or almost at the end of a transitional journey? If you placed yourself outside of the bridge, are you avoiding or simply not going through a transitional phase right now?

FINAL THOUGHTS

First, there should not be any judgment of your artwork in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, healthy or pathological. This exercise does not determine who you are, but rather gives you a glimpse of how you experience transitions in your life at this time.

Second, there may be some discrepancy between what you intended to draw (your conscious process) and what is visually expressed (your unconscious process). For example, you might have intended to draw a solid steel suspension bridge, but the bridge you drew looks flimsy and shaky. This discrepancy could be from a lack of technical skills, but it often indicates an inconsistency between what you wish for and what you actually feel. In general, you should trust the drawn images as your authentic expression of self. Such duality exists in all of us, and you can accept both parts, but visual expression adds another layer of understanding into the unconscious, often repressed part of our inner life.

Third, keep in mind that this is not an example of professional art therapy practice, which would be conducted under qualified supervision, but rather a small example of self-exploration through visual expression. I hope you gained some insight into yourself.

Ikuko Acosta, PhD, ATR-BC, is a professor in the Art Therapy Program at New York University. She has extensive clinical experience as an art therapist and art therapy educator, working with a wide range of populations including seniors, adults, adolescents, and children. She has published articles in *American Journal of Art Therapy* and has been promoting the field of art therapy globally for the past thirty years.

Word on the Street

by Howard Kaplan

What strikes me most about the good work that Prachi Rao does at Purpose, a global creative agency and campaigning lab merged into one, is the emphasis on storytelling. Whether it's a campaign regarding poverty, climate change, or voting rights, Prachi's focus is on narrative change. "My area of expertise," she explains, "is how we use culture and storytelling to build awareness on issues that are hard to move. People like change in theory, but not in practice. Strategy requires real art and leadership. It is about narrative change and helping clients, foundations, and nonprofits really think through how they can accelerate their impact."

A few years ago, Prachi worked with the Voices for Economic Opportunity Grand Challenge to change the narrative around poverty and economic mobility in the United States. The old narrative of people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps to achieve the American dream is faulty; not all bootstraps are created equally. "If you start seeing poverty as a result of circumstance and systemic inequalities, rather than an individual's fault," she tells me, "your understanding of the solution is going to be fundamentally different."

Purpose also partnered with March of Dimes, a maternal healthcare nonprofit, on the campaign Unspoken Stories. March of Dimes was undergoing a shift to highlight the breadth of issues they work on, including the maternal and infant health crisis that affects far too many moms and babies. The campaign gave voice to the stories when everything doesn't go to plan—honest experiences of pregnancy, parenthood, and loss. "These stories weren't being told," Prachi shared. "So it took a lot of bravery to lean into something that had been taboo for so long. In the end, it resonated with all sorts of folks who felt like their stories hadn't been told. These are important life moments that we had to support."

"We do quite a lot of different things," Prachi adds. "But at the heart of what we do is try to make the world a more just and livable place through participation and mobilization." The thread that runs through all of Prachi's projects and campaigns is the ability to create a vision for social impact, something that can break through the noise of today's world where we're oversaturated in media and messages. "How do you actually create a campaign that is emotionally resonant, creative, beautiful, and yet also has impact on the issues that we want?" Prachi asks. "This creative aspect is what I find the most rewarding."

Prachi Rao is a strategy director for Purpose, a global organization dedicated to making the world a more just and livable place through participation and mobilization.

In illo tempore:
Missus est an
gelus gabriel a
deo in civitate

Illuminating the Afterlife

An unusual depiction of heaven reflects beliefs about life and death in medieval Europe

Roger S. Wieck

INTERVIEWED BY

Elena Pakhoutova

THE PAINTINGS IN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS from medieval Europe offer fascinating insights into how life after death was imagined within the context of Christian beliefs. *The Parliament of Heaven* is one such richly illuminated leaf, or folio, with an unusual composition and meaning. It was originally part of a fifteenth-century book of hours, a devotional book used for prayer at fixed times throughout the day. The painting, on loan from the Morgan Library & Museum, is on display in the Rubin Museum's cross-cultural exhibition *Death Is Not the End*.

MASTER OF JACQUES DE LUXEMBOURG (FRENCH, ACTIVE 1465–1470); *PARLIAMENT OF HEAVEN*; EASTERN FRANCE OR PARIS; CA. 1465; 1 LEAF: VELLUM, ILLUMINATED, MATTED; 8 3/4 X 7/16 IN. (22.2 X 16.4 CM); THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM, NEW YORK; PURCHASED ON A GRANT PROVIDED BY THE BERNARD H. BRESLAUER FOUNDATION AND WITH A GIFT FROM MARGUERITE STEED HOFFMAN, MEMBER OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE MANUSCRIPTS, 2017; MS M.1207

Elena Pakhoutova: Why is this leaf titled *The Parliament of Heaven*?

Roger S. Wieck: It doesn't refer to a biblical event. It's based on legend and lore and arose in the Middle Ages as part of mystery plays, which often began with a scene called the parliament of heaven, with parliament meaning debate. Here God the Father is sitting at the top, flanked by two women who represent personifications of Mercy and Justice. They have debated whether God should give mankind a second chance for salvation. Because Adam and Eve committed sin, they and all of their children are forever stained

and therefore are unworthy of heaven and salvation. Justice said, no, they had their chance. And Mercy said, it's not fair to damn all of their descendants. God decides to come down in judgment in favor of Mercy. The cost of that second chance is the sacrifice of his own son, Jesus Christ. So the moment in time we see depicted is very specific and interesting. It's the moment when God has made his decision to give humankind a second chance, but he yet has not yet dispatched the angel Gabriel down to earth to visit the Virgin Mary and tell her she will become the Mother of God—the Annunciation.

On the lower left, you see what looks like a dark prison with a lot of naked people inside. That's a rare depiction of limbo—limbo before Christ's time, which was filled with what the Christians called the Just Folk of the Old Testament, those who deserved heaven, but they couldn't enter it yet because Christ had not yet come down to earth.

Can you say more about the depiction of heaven?

God the Father is surrounded by gold and red glowing colors that represent the cherubim and the seraphim. Those are the angels without bodies. What's particularly notable about this depiction of heaven is that there are no humans there yet, because they haven't been admitted.

Could you say that heaven is in waiting to receive those souls who are stuck in limbo?

Absolutely. After the crucifixion, when Christ died on the cross, he descended into hell, but that's a bit of a misnomer because what he actually descended into was limbo. We see Christ tearing down the doors of that space and pulling the just out by hand; he usually reaches for Adam first as the first of humankind. These souls were then released from limbo and taken into heaven. Heaven then became populated with people.

I find it interesting how the depiction of heaven is relayed in the implementation of colors and little details, like these golden flecks that look like stars.

They are stars. And what comes off as kind of gray blobs are actually clouds, and it's quite possible that those clouds were originally executed in silver. There is also an interesting green ground with grass on the far left, a suggestion of the earth. I think that has been put there as a kind of transition between the celestial paradise of heaven and the subterranean jail cell of limbo.

I understand that many people would be involved in the creation of a book of hours, from scribes to book binders. Who would decide to incorporate unusual depictions or iconography?

A book with this unusual kind of subject matter would have been requested by the patron of the manuscript. For a bespoke book like this they would have said, I don't want the typical iconography. The typical iconography for this particular text is simply to have a picture of Luke sitting in his study writing. This patron wanted something different.

See *The Parliament of Heaven* and other representations of the afterlife, from both Christian and Buddhist traditions, in the exhibition *Death Is Not the End* at the Rubin Museum from March 17, 2023–January 14, 2024.

Would such lavishly produced books of hours be used on an everyday basis or only on special occasions?

The book of hours was popular from about 1250 to 1550, so about three hundred years, and it was mostly in the hands of laypeople. It was wealthy laypeople—royals but also wealthy merchants—who desired to have their own book for their own democratic access to God. And it was a book that ideally was prayed from every day throughout the course of the day.

This leaf dates to about 1465, and about twenty years later, in about 1485, Parisian presses started printing books of hours. So the price went down, and the books became accessible to a whole other class of people. One thing that made them appealing is that the patron buying the manuscript or even the printed book could have some influence over its textual and pictorial contents, so they could personalize it. It often became a family heirloom and was passed down from parent to child. Some manuscripts have, for instance, family records of marriages and births and deaths and such on their flyleaves.

Did the fact that they were made for lay people help to sustain this diversity of images?

Yes. And I should also note that books of hours were not controlled by the church. They were produced by lay professional scribes and illustrated by lay professional artists for a lay market, so you didn't go to your parish priests and ask permission to have certain subjects in your book of hours. That was between you and the publisher. There's great freedom there.

Did the depiction of heaven change in these books over time?

One of the most common depictions of heaven in books of hours come within depictions of the Last Judgment. Typically, Christ is sitting on a rainbow flanked by John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary, with the rising dead popping out of the earth towards his feet. On the left is Peter near a tower, welcoming the saved into the pearly gates of heaven, and on the right, the damned being cast into hell. That's the more normal context of how heaven is depicted. The depiction on this leaf is already very different because of the presence only of angels and of no humans whatsoever. It makes it a different kind of heaven, almost like a pre-heaven in a way.

Roger S. Wieck is the Melvin R. Seiden Curator and Department Head of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, where he oversees more than eleven hundred manuscripts, spanning some ten centuries of Western illumination. Previously, he held curatorial positions at the Walters Art Museum and the Houghton Library of Harvard University. Wieck has written numerous books including *The Medieval Calendar: Locating Time in the Middle Ages* (2017).

Elena Pakhoutova is a senior curator of Himalayan art at the Rubin Museum of Art and holds a PhD in Asian art history from the University of Virginia. She has curated several exhibitions at the Rubin, most recently *Death Is Not the End* (2023), *The Second Buddha: Master of Time* (2018), and *The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel* (2019).

Friends in High Places

by Howard Kaplan

USING RESISTANCE TO FACILITATE CHANGE

Climber and physical therapist Esther Smith is currently based in Montana, but she's been practicing in mountain towns for more than ten years. Early on she began to work with climbers ranging from alpinists returning from "crazy falls" in the Himalayas who barely escaped with their lives to outdoor enthusiasts who may have popped a tendon in their finger. Though injuries differ substantially for the professional versus the recreational athlete, there are facets of being an injured sportsperson that come into play for both. The person who tumbled down a peak, however, is different than the one who hurt themselves in a climbing gym.

Esther's practice is based on understanding her patients' innate healing mechanisms that allow them to transition from one place to another physically. That could be from a very low level of physical capability if a person is coming out of a place of immobility, such as being in a cast, or it could be at a high level, like a professional ski racer getting ready for the Olympics. The common denominator in all these cases is resistance. According to Esther, "If you want to trigger something in the body, you give it load or tension or resistance and that actually signals the cells in the body to create change and to adapt."

For example, an astronaut might have low bone density and weak bones after returning from space because they are not receiving load on their body. What builds muscle and tendon material is moving through or against resistance. Holding an external weight is one way to do it. "As we age," Esther explains, "we're already losing muscle mass just by virtue of aging. But if you engage in resistance exercise, you're going to offset that and maintain your muscle mass." But what if you're afraid to hold a weight thinking it may lead to injury? One of the most surprising things Esther has observed is what people do to avoid the things that they are afraid of in terms of their own bodies.

Esther describes the case of a young woman in her twenties who came to her in pain, somebody who had modified her life, for whatever reason, to never carry anything heavy, yet wanted to live in a mountain town and lead an active lifestyle. The minute Esther put a two-pound weight in this young woman's hands, she burst into tears, so afraid the load would hurt her. Somehow, she had gotten around this all her life, but, as Esther adds, "her life would become more and more narrow if she was always afraid of this load," afraid to even carry a shopping bag. Esther's goal was to get her to open her world again, one small resistance at a time. "We can predict that the body will become stronger and make positive change," Esther says. "A person will be capable of more. There will be a stepwise, incremental, positive change along the transitional path."

Esther Smith is a physical therapist in Montana whose practice focuses on alpinists and mountain climbers who have sustained injuries during their climbs.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ELKA KRAJEWSKA

THE FOUNDER OF THE SALVAGE ART INSTITUTE IMAGINES A FICTIONAL ENCOUNTER WITH AN ARTWORK BEYOND REPAIR

BY *Elka Krajewska*

These excerpts are from a semi-fictional unpublished book, No Longer Art: In a Coma, *about select pieces from the Salvage Art Institute inventory. To read the full preface, introduction, and chapter, visit RubinMuseum.org/Spiral.*

PREFACE (fragment)

Here lies a proposition that a transformation in an artwork's qualities, if legitimized by a formal declaration of a total loss of value on the marketplace, announces the formal stripping of an art object of its status as an artwork and initiates an autonomous state of matter.

INTRODUCTION

I am in a coma and what you are reading has been carefully absorbed and transcribed by two very empathetic and committed souls, Linda and Pipo, who availed their time and their brains to make a record of my otherwise unseeable flashbacks and visions.

To stimulate my brain's transmissions, Linda and Pipo would bring into my room an object from my salvage collection vault. These are former art objects that I had retained from total loss insurance claims. The couple patiently waited for each object to emit its presence and for it to arrive into my subconscious, exciting my brain into feral activity.

You will soon realize that the content of my transmissions drifts from the collection per se. The impressions I pass on are no longer dealing only with the provenance or claim history of the objects, but bring in all my emotional and monetary investment as well as mythical beliefs I had admitted to through saving those objects from market circulation. After all, I have been giving shelter to worthless, disgraced, kicked around things because I see in them a potential I can't see anywhere else. They confirm for me that I am standing on the ground, that I am alive, here amongst you, and that all of it matters.

SESSIONS BEGIN (logs follow)

SAI 0025

[Linda and Pipo bring in the package and set it on the table: a painting that is still in its box and wrapping.]

LINDA

Best if we prepare the room a little for this one. Make some extra space, dim the lights.

[pause]

[Linda and Pipo fuss around the table, among sounds of rustling of paper, tearing of tape, and bending of cardboard.]

It is going to take a while to get around this, what one could call a painting. After twenty-seven years the paint is still gooey and literally sticks to everything that comes in contact with the surface. We are having trouble unpacking it and unsticking it from all the protective tissue and cardboard.

Here is the code: SAI 0025: materials: oil, resin varnish, plywood, wrapping; size: 14 by 35½ by 2 inches and variable; damage: unknown, packaging stuck to painting when wet; claim: unknown; total loss: unknown; production: 1992; artist: Duane Slick; title: A Tale of Two Trees or Two Trees.

PIPO

We have no official paperwork for this piece except for the entry in the deed of gift and a condition report from 2015.

CONDITION REPORT

Description of the Work

The painting is executed in oil paint on a wooden board. It depicts an abstract scene of two trees in bright colors. The paint is applied in fast brushstrokes and shows a thick impasto in some areas.

Condition of the Work

The painting is packed in a shadow box made of cardboard sheets attached with staples to three sides of the painting and covered with a sheet of cardboard and clear Saran wrap. The edges of the cardboard shadow box are partially stuck onto the paint surface. In areas where the cardboard touched the surface, the structure has changed significantly. In some areas the paint is compressed (parallel imprint to the edge) and the structure (brush strokes and impasto) flattened. In other areas the paint layer underneath is exposed. In the center of the painting a piece of cardboard from the lid is sticking to the surface. Additionally, some of the paint is stuck on the cardboard sheets. A piece of Saran wrap is sticking onto the right edge of the painting, which was not covered with the shadow box.

The oil paint in general appears not to have cured and is still sticky. There are drop-shaped accumulations of what seems to be yellowed oil or resin. These areas are especially soft and sticky.

LINDA

I read that the artist identifies as a first-generation urban Indian, born of a father from the Meskwaki Nation in Iowa and a mother from the Ho-Chunk Nation in Nebraska. Both cultures have profound relationship to source materials, wood, resin, nature in general.

PIPO

I will light a few candles, so we allow shadows to form and so we may become aware of wider presence.

[Pipo finds candles and lights them in the two corners of the room.]

I am confirming that what has been applied over some parts of the oil paint is natural resin. I can smell it. Resin is really the original incense as most comes from refined tree sap. It has been used mainly in spiritual, religious ceremonies and some pagan practices.

[Pipo turns a soft spotlight over the half-unpacked painting.]

[Transmission begins]

[Transcription begins]

log 25.1

Careful, wet paint. Of wetness. Of being moist. Of being a moist organ. Of being amongst moist organs. Of resembling a cosmic womb. Of the shifting of states. Of leaving marks. Of leaving traces. Of being sticky, of fluid state that signals opening, incompleteness, endlessness. Of finding a relief in it, a reconciliation. Of coming from mud or of coming from marshlands.

Do I, or if I, dare come near.

Whatever entered has multiple spirits attending because, well, our blood is not pure after all. Too many violent rapes proceeding us, mud in the veins. Yet still, important to light a beacon on top of the stack, attempt to reconcile what's been left behind and what is waiting. This thing or person wants to be present, and it wants to spread.

log 25.2

The world is liquid, inside and outside of us. When matter liquefies it's in preparation for a change of state. There should be some respect around a liquid state, some recognition of its magic. Same as with sleep perhaps, a liquid and a sleeping person, human or animal, are holy. They emit a force that recalibrates the universe.

log 25.3

To prepare the space for transformation. Maintaining the wetness for the purpose of inviting the materials to merge at will and also to take on new forms, interfere with the surrounding. Invite the immediate.

log 25.4

Once the interior is prepared, the rites begin. Silence around.

log 25.5

Each day she wakes up to touch a wet part of her body. A biologically necessary product of comingling of belief and art.

What is the belief? That the intelligence is much greater than any history has imagined, and creating conduits to this intelligence needs aliveness and singularity of failure and group dynamics, all in synchronicity?

log 25.6

The ceremony begins. No clear sign but an atmosphere from constant dripping, the humidity and the accompanying tones. Energy shooting from star-like points, from black moth-like stains and smears. Soot-like.

LINDA

I tried to cover the mess a little, peeled away the excess of tissue, wrapping tissue I mean. But in a sense to no effect; the cardboard curls back, new tissue, bits of Saran wrap sticking again. Only more and more vulnerable, exposed.

PIPO

How about if we leave it out, laid out like this, breathing, for a while in the room air.

log 25.10

It's a dying body. Time stops. If you anticipate a clean resolution, stop right here. All there is to be done is to take care of it, and each other in this space. Put proper things in their proper place.

Minute after minute, things fall apart. Crumbling, liquefying, cracking. Slipping, the sliding of skins, of surface against surface.

It's a dying body. Time stops. If you anticipate a clean resolution, stop right here.

[Transmission resumes]

log 25.7

You are like a continuous gift. Unconsumed, half closing, part opening (very slowly) like a never closed deal. On one hand how horrible to leave you out like this. Half unwrapped.

log 25.8

A painting, active like this, exudes radiance before it turns to ash, before wood becomes black soot.

log 25.9

Cyclically, as the time turns, in the most wet areas, the paint gradually grows a thin protective skin. Airing. Curing but not healing. Until it is disturbed again. A temporary membrane acting as a mediator between humans and trees. Similarly between this world and bigger world, the bigger world containing all possibilities of intelligence and organizing of that intelligence.

A shimmer of gold catching the eye, of orange color seducing butterflies and capturing lonesome birds. Dizzying heat of sun rays, warmth of the hearth pulsing through the air. Of pools of sticky honey on a plate. A trap.

log 25.11

A body brought in to die slowly in peace. Renouncing clocks, bringing down the lights.

This continuous dissolving, prolonged expiring.

log 25.12

Liquidity eases trembling. It somehow glues the otherwise disruptive tremors. In a space where afternoon falls over with the sun, and the body splinters into rattling, tiny motions, the glue arising from moist air, softens and slows all movement.

log 25.13

An unfinished work resists evaluation, one cannot appraise something that has not taken its final shape, because the evolving value would need to be contractual. It refuses to be commodified, cannot be fixed. It continually opens to the audience, to itself. It challenges its maker continually postponing its abandonment.

log 25.14

The Western cultures point to closure as a way to resolve the past experience. Other traditions however emphasize openness and readiness for contact and reconciliation.

There is justified caution around an object that is alive, moist but not necessary of human or animal origin. That caution must relate to profound, primitive experience. The aliveness confronts with watchfulness, requires recognition. Liquid cells are in the end in motion both on the molecular and apparent scale.

log 25.15

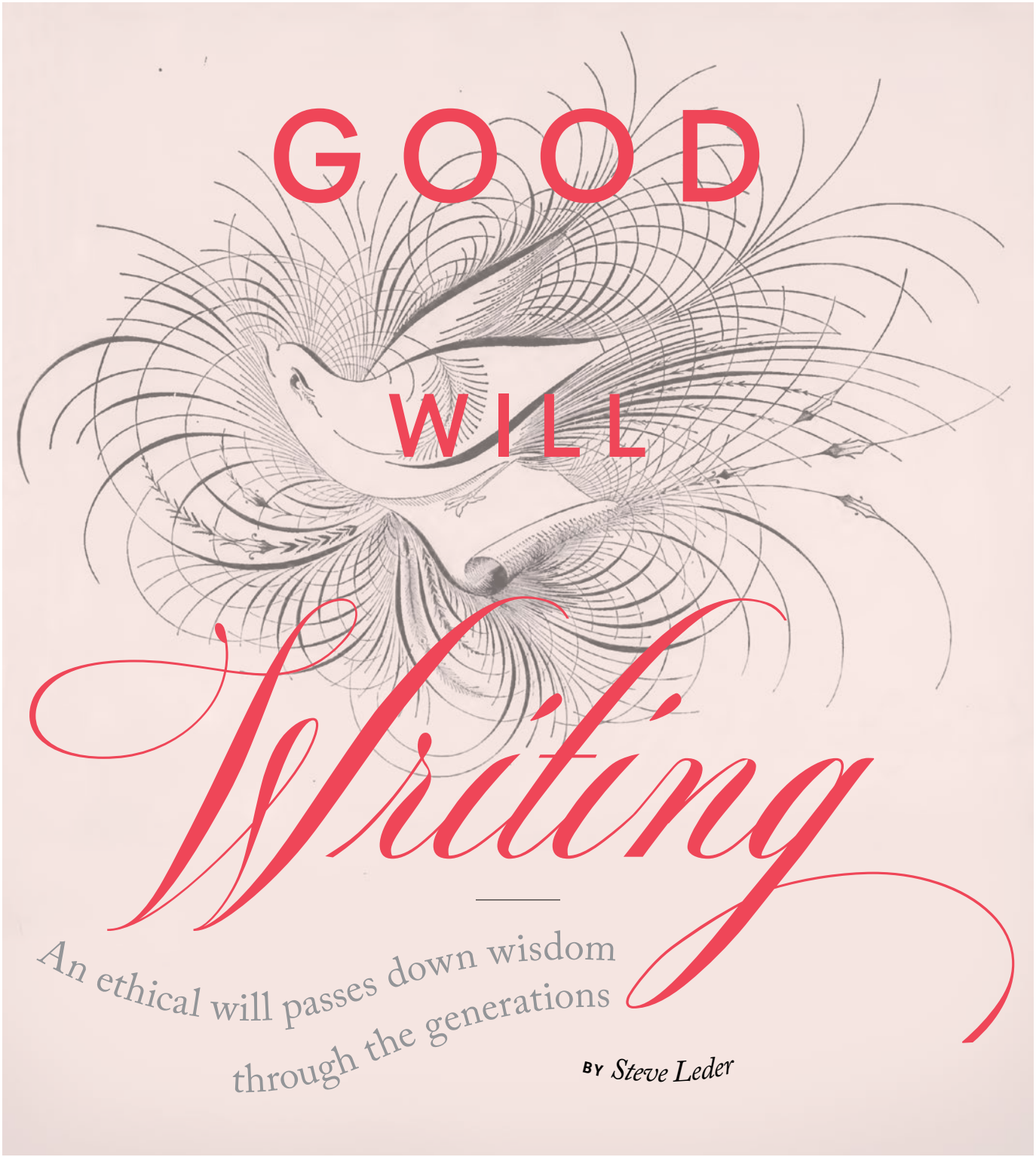
Here we meet on a ceremonial ground. Here is what I can offer.

Considering that our previous generations have witnessed profound cruelty amongst each other and towards all surrounding living organisms, and that they had not skills or tools to process or transform them, you need to let those cruelties surface in your lives. Instead of attempting to wash them, the stains that never go away, or even worse, domesticate them, the acts of cruelty need to find their transformation materials and a place of equilibrium. They need to be revisited, understood, and recoded through acts of love.

[Transmission ends]

[Transcription ends]

Elka Krajewska is an interdisciplinary artist and experimental filmmaker. She is also the president of the Salvage Art Institute, which she founded in 2009 to articulate the nature of artworks declared "total loss" by insurance companies and officially removed from art market circulation. Learn more at SalvageArtInstitute.org.



GOOD WILL Writing

An ethical will passes down wisdom through the generations

BY *Steve Leder*

THE TRADITION OF LEAVING WORDS for our loved ones in the form of what Judaism calls an ethical will goes back a long time. Yet many people have never heard of this ancient tradition. An ethical will is a document that includes stories and reflections about your past. It can include joy and regrets, and ultimately becomes both a way to remember a loved one who is gone and a primer on how to live a better, happier life. My own ethical will takes the form of a letter to my two children.

Every Breath You/We Take

Some believe the practice of ethical wills dates back to the time of the Bible. In Genesis, a dying Jacob gathers his sons to his deathbed to offer them his blessing. Other biblical examples of ethical wills include Moses instructing the Israelites to be a holy people and teach their children. Author Barry Baines has written about how the New Testament also contains descriptions of verbal ethical wills. He points to John 15–17, a recounting of Jesus's parting advice and blessings to his followers, and Matthew 5, where Jesus blesses his disciples. The early rabbis urged fathers to verbally communicate the teachings and values of their tradition to their sons. Later they wrote letters.

The oldest still-preserved written ethical will is from the eleventh century and by Eleazar, the son of Isaac of Worms. When he was near death, Eleazar became more aware of his mistakes as a father and decided to make up for them in his ethical will. He wrote, "Think not of evil, for evil thinking leads to evil doing," "Purify thy body, the dwelling-place of thy soul," and "Give of all thy food a portion to God. Let God's portion be the best, and give it to the poor." In his letter, he cites what his sons should do, from reciting the Shema, a Hebrew prayer, at the correct hour to keeping water at the bedside in order to wash their hands quickly in the morning. Eleazar's will is also a good example of how a parent can be honest about his or her shortcomings in a way that may draw parent and child closer.

The term "ethical will" may have been coined by Professor Israel Abrahams, a leading scholar born in London in 1858, who wrote about Jews in the Middle Ages and published *Hebrew Ethical Wills* in 1926. He collected and studied ethical wills in part because he believed they "are among the richest sources of information that we have with respect to attitudes of medieval and early modern Jewish parents toward their children."

How to Write an Ethical Will

Like me, my ethical will is a work in progress, unfolding as my life unfolds and I lose people I love. We are all made up of our stories—the stories of our wounds, hard-earned wisdom, laughter, joy, suffering, healing, failing, and loving. There is much for us to teach within our stories and much for our loved ones to learn and hold on to. After all, our stories are made up of words. Words are the most real and important things we can leave behind when we are gone.

One of the surprising things I've learned from asking people questions about their lives is not only that we often regret the things we didn't do more than those we did, but also that there are remarkable commonalities among those things. Most of us regret the same kinds of missed opportunities. The chances we did not take and the dreams we did not pursue because we were consumed by meeting other people's expectations. The times we chose to suffer alone for far too long before reaching out for help. The precious moments we missed forever because we failed to show up for the occasions and people that mattered most.

We start with the question "What do you regret?" for a reason. Beginning with regret demonstrates fearlessness and truth-telling. It shows vulnerability and honest reflection that adds credibility and depth to our answers to all of the questions that follow. Most of all, beginning by honestly acknowledging what we did not do but wish we had may well enable our loved ones—at least a little more than they otherwise would have—to follow their dreams, reach out for help, and take more opportunities to celebrate life and share love. Speak openly of your regrets with truth and vulnerability so that your loved ones might learn from you.

Then consider the following questions:

When was a time you led with your heart?
What makes you happy?
What was your biggest failure?
What got you through your greatest challenge?
What is a good person?
What is love?
Have you ever cut someone out of your life?
How do you want to be remembered?
What is good advice?
What will your epitaph say?
What will your final blessing be?

We do not like to think about it, but the truth is that none of us has forever, and none of us ever really knows for certain when death will come. As much as there is a time to deny death in order to fully live and cherish each moment, there is a time to share the deepest truths of our lives for our loved ones to know and to hold even when, especially when, we are gone.

To read Steve Leder's ethical will to his children, visit RubinMuseum.org/Spiral.

Reprinted from *FOR YOU WHEN I AM GONE: Twelve Essential Questions to Tell a Life Story* by Steve Leder with permission from Avery, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House, LLC. Copyright © 2022 by Steve Leder.

Steve Leder is the senior rabbi of Wilshire Boulevard Temple. He is the author of five books, including *The Extraordinary Nature of Ordinary Things* and *More Money Than God: Living a Rich Life Without Losing Your Soul*, as well as the bestsellers *More Beautiful Than Before: How Suffering Transforms Us* and *The Beauty of What Remains: How Our Greatest Fear Becomes Our Greatest Gift*. His newest release is *For You When I Am Gone: Twelve Essential Questions to Tell a Life Story*.

About the Museum

The Rubin Museum of Art

WHERE CONTEMPORARY MINDS MEET THE ART AND WISDOM OF THE HIMALAYAS

Through Himalayan art, cultures, and ideas, the Rubin Museum of Art serves as a guidepost to examine big questions about what it means to be human today, with the intent of creating a more compassionate, resilient world. With its globally renowned collection, largely centered around art from the Tibetan Plateau, the Rubin fosters understanding and appreciation of this region by relating its art and ideas to our shared human experience today. Inspired by the philosophical traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous religions, and aligned with ongoing research into learning, behavior, and the brain, the Rubin offers innovative exhibitions and programs at its New York City location and beyond that examine provocative ideas. Through this work, the Museum serves as a space for reflection and personal transformation, opening windows to inner worlds so visitors can better navigate outer ones.

MUSEUM HOURS

Monday CLOSED
Tuesday CLOSED
Wednesday CLOSED
Thursday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM
Friday 11:00 AM–10:00 PM*
Saturday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM
Sunday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM

*Free admission every Friday from 6:00–10:00 PM

Visit RubinMuseum.org for up-to-date open hours.

VISIT

150 West 17th Street New York, NY 10011
Between 6th and 7th Avenues

CONNECT WITH US

Explore the collection, attend a program, discover inspiring stories, and receive the latest updates on our exhibitions and event listings.

- Visit us online at RubinMuseum.org
- Join our email list at RubinMuseum.org/enews
- Listen to AWAKEN, our podcast featuring personal stories about the dynamic path to enlightenment. Available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.
- Follow us on social media

THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID DE ARMAS; OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPH BY FILIP WOLAK

Exhibitions

Through the lens of Himalayan art, the Rubin presents permanent and temporary exhibitions in New York City and beyond that explore our shared human experience and help us insightfully navigate the complexities of our world today.

NYC EXHIBITIONS

Gateway to Himalayan Art
This introduction to the rich artistic traditions of the region illuminates key figures, symbols, ideas, practices, materials, and techniques presented in the Rubin Museum collection.

Mandala Lab
Consider the power of transforming complex emotions into wisdoms in this interactive space for social and emotional learning, featuring five thought-provoking installations inspired by a Tibetan Buddhist mandala.

Masterworks: A Journey through Himalayan Art
Journey across geography and more than a thousand years of history, tracing artistically and historically significant works from the Rubin's collection as well as new acquisitions and gifts.

The Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room
Step into the *Shrine Room* for a moment of contemplation, beauty, or wonder. An ongoing focal point of the Rubin Museum and a visitor favorite, this immersive installation features art from the collection and is inspired by traditional shrines.

Download our free app, *The Rubin*, and enjoy audio content about art from our collection in the palm of your hand.

Shrine Room Projects: Rohini Devasher/ Palden Weinreb
Through October 29, 2023
In dialogue with the *Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room* at the center of the gallery, contemporary artists reinterpret traditional religious iconography and practices through sculptural installation, painting, and video.

Death Is Not the End
March 17, 2023–January 14, 2024
Contemplate ideas about death and afterlife through the art of Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity in this cross-cultural exhibition that features objects from the Rubin Museum's collection alongside loans from major institutions and private collections.

TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS

Gateway to Himalayan Art
Conceptually modeled after the exhibition at the Rubin, this nationally traveling exhibition visits university galleries and museums, with its first stop at Lehigh University Art Galleries (through May 26, 2023) followed by the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College (fall 2023).

Mandala Lab
The traveling version of the Mandala Lab installation brings the five interactive experiences to the public realm for free. It debuted in Bilbao, Spain, in 2022 and continues its European tour in 2023.

Programs

The Rubin presents an array of in-person and online thematic public programs, from dialogues on mind science to art-making workshops for families that dive deeper into the art and cultures of the Himalayas. Many programs are free or pay as you wish.

AWAKEN podcast
Season 3 launches in fall 2023
This podcast series explores the dynamic path to enlightenment and what it means to "wake up" with personal stories from guests who share how they've experienced a shift in their awareness, and as a result, their perspective on life. Available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Brainwave
Fall 2023
Our longest running talk series investigates how our minds shape our everyday experiences by combining the most compelling advancements in science with wisdom rooted in Himalayan traditions.

Family Sundays
1:00–3:00 PM, in the Mandala Lab
Join us for an afternoon of activities both kids and grown-ups will enjoy. Recommended for ages 3 and older with accompanying adults.

Empowering Caregivers
This program invites caregivers to examine the power dynamics in their lives and open their minds to a different understanding of their own agency.

Himalayan Heritage
Rubin Museum educator and Himalayan region expert Tashi Chodron hosts a recurring program that explores the cultures, art, history, and sacred traditions of the Himalayan region through discussions, performances, and talks with guest speakers.

Mindfulness Meditation
Thursdays, 1:00 PM
Practice the art of attention in this forty-five-minute program for beginners and skilled meditators alike. Each session is inspired by a different work of art from the Rubin Museum's collection and includes an opening talk, twenty-minute sitting session led by an expert teacher, and closing discussion.

The **Mindfulness Meditation Podcast** is a recording of each session and is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

K2 Friday Nights
Free admission, 6:00–10:00 PM
Explore the galleries for free, join a 7:15 PM exhibition tour, and hang out in Café Serai, which transforms into the K2 Lounge with a special drinks menu and live DJ set.

Mindful Connections Online
For visitors with dementia and their caregivers
Every month trained guides facilitate an online experience designed to promote engagement with works of art and other participants.

All programs subject to change. For current listings, visit RubinMuseum.org/events.

Experience More

Discover unique items from our shop, or make the Rubin the lively venue for your next private in-person or online event.

The Shop
Take a memory of the Museum home with you or give a gift from the Rubin. The shop's selection of jewelry, textiles, books, and other treasures includes an array of unique items, many unavailable anywhere else. All proceeds from the shop support the Rubin Museum, and items can be purchased in store or online at RubinMuseum.org. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases.

Monique Vase

Private Events and Rentals
Whether you're planning an office party or family gathering, we'll guide you through the process of planning a fabulous event at the Rubin Museum complete with after-hours gallery access and special drink menus. Learn more at RubinMuseum.org/space-rentals.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FILIP WOLAK AND ASYA GOROVITS

Scholarship

The Rubin is a platform for advancing knowledge and a broader understanding of Himalayan art and cultures globally.

PROJECT HIMALAYAN ART

This three-part initiative is the Museum's most ambitious contribution to and investment in the field of Himalayan art and cultures. Project Himalayan Art provides students, educators, artists, and lifelong learners introductory resources for learning about and teaching Himalayan art, with an emphasis on cross-cultural exchange.

Publication
Himalayan Art in 108 Objects offers an accessible introduction to Himalayan art as illuminated by a selection of objects from the Neolithic era to today. Essays by seventy-two international scholars from different fields and disciplines contextualize the art within religious, social, literary, and material culture. The book is available in late spring 2023. Preorder by emailing shop@rubinmuseum.org.

Traveling Exhibition
Gateway to Himalayan Art is an introduction to the art and cultures of the greater Himalayan region featuring artworks from the Rubin Museum's collection. The nationally traveling exhibition presents the fundamental visual language and meanings of Tibetan Buddhist and other Himalayan art, outlines the materials and techniques used to create such works, and highlights the living practices and intentions behind these objects. The exhibition foregrounds voices from Himalayan communities, including artists, practitioners, and teachers.

Digital Platform
Project Himalayan Art is an online hub for the study of Himalayan art. It combines materials from the exhibition and publication with multimedia content, such as videos, 3D models, 360-degree object views, interactive maps, and geography-based narratives, as well as a glossary and teaching resources. The site enables teachers to seamlessly source materials for their classes in a range of disciplines—including philosophy, anthropology, archeology, geography, history, art, and religion—and encourages students to do their own extensive research.

Explore Project Himalayan Art by scanning the QR code or visit RubinMuseum.org/projecthimalayanart.

Chakrasamvara with Consort Vajravarahi; Kham Province, eastern Tibet; 19th century; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation; F1997.7.2 (HAR 99)

You Make It Possible

The Rubin Museum is only as strong as our supporters. You help us create a space for learning, contemplation, inspiration, community, and art. Join us! Visit RubinMuseum.org/support to learn more.

Become a member or give the gift of membership
Members get more! Benefits include free admission, *Spiral* magazine mailed to your home for free, shop discounts, exclusive tours, talks, and programs, and much more. Membership to the Rubin Museum of Art is also a special gift that friends and family of all ages can enjoy throughout the year.

Make a donation
Your support helps make art and timeless wisdom come alive for thousands of people each year, bringing inspiration and meaning into our visitors' lives.

Give a major gift
With gifts of $5,000 and above, you can align your philanthropy and passion with generous support for our annual programs and multiyear initiatives. Your support strengthens our efforts to cultivate learning, promote understanding, and inspire personal connections to the ideas, cultures, and art of the Himalayan region at the Museum and globally. Making a generous donation is a vote of confidence for the Rubin and proof of the power of Himalayan art and philosophies to benefit people of all ages and backgrounds.

To learn more, contact Jillian Flexner, Senior Manager, Major Gifts, at 212.620.6500 x203 or jflexner@rubinmuseum.org.

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A MAGAZINE AT THE INTERSECTION OF ART, SCIENCE, AND HIMALAYAN CULTURES

Spiral asks big questions at the center of our shared human experience: life and death, connection to one another and our world, identity, states of consciousness, the cosmos, and the nature of existence. The Life After issue explores the defining moments in our lives when we cross the threshold between before and after. Amid possible grief or joy, fear or excitement, how do we embrace the unknown and imagine what comes next?

#LIFEAFTER

RubinMuseum.org

Sign up at **RubinMuseum.org/enews** to stay up to date with exhibitions, programming, virtual and in-person offerings, and more.